

72nd ANNIVERSARY OF 14th AMENDMENT ADOPTION POINTS NEED OF UNITY TO GET FRANCHISE IN SOUTH

By Angelo Herndon

The fight to enfranchise 12,000,000 people of the South through the passage of the Geyer anti-poll tax bill, and securing the protection of the Negro people against a new wave of mob violence that is sweeping the country by the enactment of the federal anti-lynching bill, are two burning fundamental problems facing all the American people.

On this 72nd Anniversary of the adoption of the 14th Amendment, the struggle for Negro rights should be uppermost in the minds of Americans.

This is especially true at a time when the world across the seas is set aflame with war and when the leaders of our own country are trying to effect a "national unity," which, they allege, is the only guarantee of safeguarding American democracy. But this "national unity" is a united front of Wall Street against the people.

CONVINCING PROOF

If any convincing proof were needed to show how the Roosevelt administration and the money kings, who flout the law and throw the Constitution out of the window, are united in their determination to destroy the civil and democratic rights of the people, the shameful treatment of 15,000,000 Negro Americans is sufficient.

For more than 23 years the Ne-

gro people and their sympathizers have been fighting for the passage of federal legislation which would protect them against mob violence and lawlessness. But the leaders of the government and those who are parading about the land behind the false banner of "national unity," have sought at every turn to block and head off the fight for anti-lynching legislation which is so essential to the protection and extension of democracy to all citizens.

The right to life, citizenship and political franchise, specifically guaranteed to the Negro people in the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, form the very basis of a broad genuine democracy.

AFFECTS ALL THE PEOPLE

If the fundamental concept of democracy as written into these amendments over the bitter opposition of the representatives of the Southern landed aristocracy and the Northern industrialists, is withheld and denied to the Negro people, it is likewise withheld and denied to all the people.

There can be no real democracy for some of the people while it is denied to others.

When the reactionaries are doing everything in their power to involve America in another imperialist war to make the world "safe for democracy," the fight for the full realization of the rights vouchsafed to the Negro people by the 14th

amendment, adopted in Congress on July 28, 1868, is of the greatest importance to the entire nation.

There is not only the great need of waging battle in defense of and for the enforcement of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution. The fight to abolish the undemocratic poll-tax system in the South and the wiping out of the evil and barbarous crime of lynching, is a test in the fight for the preservation of democracy and keeping America out of war.

NEED SAME SPIRIT

The courageous efforts put forth by the progressive and really democratic Americans for the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, represent the kind of spirit and determination needed today to preserve the fruits of their life work and to go ever forward in the building of a truly democratic nation.

In the fight for the passage of these amendments the country was fortunate to have such men as Thaddeus Stevens, Frederick Douglass and many others, who championed not only the cause of the newly emancipated slaves, but the rights of all the people.

How determined the opposition was in preventing the Negro people from participating in the government as equals, is seen in the struggle which developed when the 15th amendment was up before Con-

gress for debate and passage. The progressives had attempted to include with the right to vote, the right also for Negroes to hold public office. But an amendment offered by the reactionaries struck out of the original clause: "the right of the citizen to vote or hold office," the words "or hold office."

PATH OF REACTION

By that act, the way was paved for a series of reactionary decisions handed down by the Supreme Court infringing upon the rights of the Negro people.

In the case of *U. S. vs. Williams*, 1193 U. S., 632, the Supreme Court ruled that "the privilege to vote in any state is not given by the Federal Constitution or by any of its amendments."

The exclusion of Negroes from the ballot and the right to hold public office is symptomatic of a growing cancer eating at the heart of American democracy. It is just plain hypocritical deceit for the super "patriots" who talk about saving democracy in Europe by draining the taxpayers dry, when ten per cent of the population has no representation in the government, though they are made to pay more than their share of all public bills.

If America is so democratic, why not a few Negro governors in some of the democratic states, especially in those states where Ne-

groes constitute the majority of the population? By reason of their numbers Negroes are entitled to hold ten per cent of all elective and appointive positions in the federal government, beginning with Congress on down. But why do not Negroes occupy such offices? Certainly there is no excuse that can be given in accordance with the concept of real democracy.

The recent lynchings of Negroes in Tennessee who attempted to exercise their democratic right to register in order to vote in the 1940 Presidential election, is indicative of the cold-blooded determination of the ruling class to force the people to accept its rule of terror and suppression.

With the Communist Party having already blazed the trail in ten years of struggle for the enforcement of the rights guaranteed to the Negro people in the Constitution, the 72nd anniversary of the adoption of the 14th amendment should be the occasion for a renewed and vigorous fight for the passage of the Geyer anti-poll tax bill and the federal anti-lynching bill.

Unity of labor, the Negro people and all Americans opposed to tyranny and oppression, will soon make impossible the day when the capitalist rulers of our land can subvert the constitutional liberties of the people into instruments of repression and slavery.