

THE NEGRO IN THE WAR

He is stepping out of his old "place" into his rightful one in American life. The fate of Jim Crow under the blows of anti-fascist battle. By Doxey A. Wilkerson.

Two years of war have brought significant changes in the relations of the Negro people to America. Our nation's past struggles against the deadly Axis enemy abroad and against its traitorous helpers here at home, and especially the bitter struggles on both fronts which loom immediately ahead, have placed the "Negro Question" on the agenda for early and basic solution. The progressive liberation of the Negro people is now urgently required to assure the freedom of our nation as a whole. It is also entirely possible.

During the period immediately following Pearl Harbor, the Negro people were struggling to redefine their relations to this war. In common with millions of other Americans, many Negroes were still somewhat confused by the sharp turn in world history which the events of the preceding June 22 had brought about.

Even in the late spring of 1942, there were widespread doubts among the Negro people as to what this war meant to them. "An imperialist war cannot help to free the Negro." "Why fight fascism in Germany when we have fascism right here in America?" "This is a white man's war in which the Negro has no stake." "Those little yellow Japanese sure are giving the whites the good beating they deserve." Such expressions were then common in the Negro community.

These early doubts and confusion have largely been cleared away. The great mass of Negroes now know that this is *their* war, that an Axis victory would plunge the Negro people into a fascist slavery far worse than their forefathers ever knew. They sense that of necessity the war has had to assume a liberating character which promises increased freedom for the Negro and all other oppressed peoples. They reject the Axis propaganda that fascist Japan is fighting for "the colored peoples of the world."

There still are a few George S. Schuylers and A. Philip Randolphs among the Negro people, but their defeatist, anti-war "leadership" now has no substantial mass base. Negro Americans are overwhelmingly in support of their country's struggle for survival.

ALONG with their growing support of the nation's war effort—indeed, largely because of it—the Negro people have developed a new and militant determination to win greater freedom for themselves in the very course of the war. Traditional Jim Crow barriers formerly taken for granted are now vigorously challenged. On

the trains and street cars of the South, in industrial plants throughout the nation, in lily-white theaters and restaurants, in the armed forces, in the affairs of government, the Negro people are stepping out of the "place" which custom has set aside for the darker brother of our land. They are demanding *now* an ever larger share of the democracy which their brawn and brains and blood are called upon to defend. Fortified by the knowledge that their cause is not only just, but also necessary for the wartime strength of the nation, the Negro people are definitely on the march toward greater freedom.

During the two years since Pearl Harbor, many white friends and allies of the Negro people have likewise cleared away much of their early doubts and confusion about the wisdom of wartime struggles for Negro freedom. There was a period when many sincere liberals and some progressives, in their concern and desire for national unity, neglected the democratic bases upon which alone it could be built. Especially was there a tendency to soft-pedal campaigns for Negro rights, on the ground that such struggles must now give way to the larger life-and-death struggle of the nation as a whole.

This false assumption was never more strikingly challenged than in Earl Browder's Madison Square Garden address in July 1942. He then declared: "The Communist Party supports these demands of the Negro people unconditionally, and we declare that they must be granted now, at once—precisely in the interests of national unity, of using every productive force for winning the war. Support for the war requires support for the demands of the Negro people, and not silence on these demands or their denial."

There still remain the die-hard reactionaries and the John Temple Graves II type of liberals, who continue to press for a moratorium on the fight for Negro rights. But most of the progressive forces of our country are coming rapidly to see the Negro's struggle for freedom as an integral and necessary part of the nation's struggle for survival.

THE wartime changes in the Negro's relations to America are not restricted to ideology alone. Striking qualitative changes are under way in the economic, social, and political life of the country. Indeed, as Frederick Douglass said of a similar development eighty years ago, "the revolution is tremendous."

Hundreds of thousands of Negro men

and women are now employed in industrial and civil service jobs from which they have traditionally been barred. The War Labor Board has handed down the historic decision that the wages of white and Negro workers must be equal. The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices, born just as the war took its great liberating turn in the summer of 1941, has lived through two serious crises during the past nine months and now moves stronger than ever to the performance of its crucial tasks.

The Jim Crow barriers in public conveyances and places of assembly are being subjected to terrific strain, and here and there they are cracking. The Negro presidents of the republics of Liberia and Haiti are feted with all the ceremony and acclaim that the White House can command. Even our laggard Department of Justice finds it necessary to move against the dual curse of peonage and lynching.

Negro men are now fighting for their nation's freedom in every branch of the armed forces. In the Merchant Marine, mixed white and Negro crews sail their Liberty ships through submarine-infested seas under the command of Negro captains. Even the Air Corps, the Army's Judge Advocate, and the traditionally lily-white Navy have been forced to admit Negro Americans into their service.

The Negro people are also winning new friends and allies and forging new relationships with the progressive political forces of our country. There appear a Henry Wallace, an Eleanor Roosevelt, and a Pearl Buck boldly to champion the cause of Negro freedom. In the trade union movement, especially in the great and democratic industrial unions of the CIO, new bonds of comradeship are being formed between white and Negro workers. As was most strikingly demonstrated at the recent CIO Convention, the power of organized labor is being thrown more and more into the struggle for Negro rights.

Of especial significance is the growing acceptance by the Negro people of the Communist Party as their main political instrument of struggle toward freedom. Nearly 5,000 Negroes joined the Party during the 1943 spring recruiting drive alone. In last month's councilmanic elections in New York City, for the first time in the history of the nation, a Negro Communist was elected to public office.

THESE progressive changes in the status and relationships of the Negro people result primarily from the iron necessities of war. They reflect also the progressive war

aims which the spokesmen of our country have been forced to proclaim. Especially are they a product of the increasing struggles of the Negro people themselves, and of their closer alignment with the progressive forces of our nation in the developing national front for victory.

There is much yet to be done. The remaining racial bars to full Negro employment in war production must be blasted completely from our economic life. The power of government must be turned far more vigorously to the destruction of enemy plots to disrupt the war effort through deliberately inspired anti-Negro riots. Poll tax barriers to the political expression of win-the-war sentiments in the Deep South must be removed. Demoralizing and weakening Jim Crow practices in the armed forces must be uprooted completely. The full civil rights of the Negro people must be firmly established throughout the land.

This unfinished business of American democracy has now been thrust on the order of the day by the urgent necessities of war. The progressive forces which have pushed forward their achievements during the past two years must now move with increasing vigor to complete the job. The necessity arises not solely from the demands

of democratic fair play; it is an imperative requirement of victory.

At the end of our second year of war our nation is confronted with the most stupendous tasks of its history. There must be full implementation of the progressive Moscow Conference agreements to shorten the war and organize a just and durable peace. Our home front must be consolidated to support the major military struggles which lie ahead. Especially must a win-the-war government be returned to power in the elections of 1944.

Arrayed in opposition to these goals are powerful forces of reaction at home and abroad. The German and Japanese war machines are tremendously dangerous still. The defeatist-appeaser cabal within our country is redoubling its efforts to save the Axis from decisive defeat. They still hope to disrupt the United Nations coalition through vicious attacks upon our British and Soviet allies. They seize upon every available issue to demoralize and weaken our home front. Concentrating upon the Republican Party as their main political instrument, they are determined to establish a pro-fascist, imperialist government in America in 1944.

These are the gigantic struggles which

loom for the period immediately ahead. Upon their outcome will depend, not only the future freedom of the Negro people, but also the freedom of our entire nation and the world.

The glorious achievements thus far of United Nations arms, especially of the great Red Army, have created all the preconditions for a quick and decisive Allied victory in Europe, followed by the certain defeat of Japan. A firm coalition of progressive Democrats, organized labor, and the Negro people can assure the defeat of reaction here at home, the full implementation of the Moscow Conference agreements, and the triumph of the win-the-war forces in the coming elections. The quickest possible cementing of that coalition is now the most urgent requirement of the day. The Negro people have much at stake in the fulfillment of this task. They also have a crucial role to play.

Thus, in the decisive struggles which lie ahead, as during the past two years of this war, the dominant goals of the Negro people and those of the nation are mutually interdependent. The two are now inseparably merged; both must move forward together.

DOXEY A. WILKERSON.

SLINGS AND ARROWS

The War Department's tremendous picture "Battle of Russia," is suffering at the hands of local censors. Pennsylvania cut out all Nazi atrocity scenes: too many Germans in Pennsylvania? Boston banned the picture altogether for a period. And no one at all may see one of the most needed scenes: the animated map showing and stating why "it was necessary for the security of the Soviet Union" to enter some of the Baltic states and defeat the Mannerheim Finland forces. "In an effort to defend herself Soviet Russia had to move in," the picture explained. "These states were part of her security zone." That section was entirely cut from the picture before it was nationally released, though the men in the armed forces had the benefit of it.

Chester A. Arthur III, grandson of President Arthur, has joined the Merchant Marine and the National Maritime Union. Recently he was spied at the Plaza bar in his blue mariner's sweater. Arthur was a poet and editor in California, and in the past few years has worked very hard with the Democratic State Committee.

Scoop! Item in Leonard Lyons' column, "The Lyons Den," New York "Post," November 23: "Ruth McKenney, author of 'My Sister Eileen,' has named her new-born baby Eileen. . . ." How long does a baby stay "new-born"? If Lyons read NEW MASSES regularly (adv.), he would have learned of the baby's birth from our Dec. 29, 1942 issue. Little Eileen is now eleven months old.

The influential magazine of the Soviet trade unions, "War and the Working Class," has paid a high tribute to an American book. It has begun publishing excerpts from Max Werner's "Attack Can Win the War in 1943."

Jean Muir, one of the founders of the Hollywood anti-Nazi League, becomes a Broadway producer soon with a Russian comedy of domestic life. Her next venture Miss Muir will direct herself.

Robert Magidoff, NBC correspondent at Moscow, has returned with a play about Russia. Like the Russians, he felt he must put into an art form the tremendous experiences he has had in the USSR.

Hitler in his last speech mentioned with approval "an article in an American newspaper which showed how devoted are the German women to Nazism." This article was by Countess R. G. Waldeck and appeared in the "Saturday Evening Post." Countess Waldeck, the former Rosi Goldschmidt, is the author of the book "Meet Mr. Blank" (reviewed in the November 16 NM), a not too subtle plea for a deal with the "good" Nazis.

This column recently stated that Richard Wright's short novel, "The Man Who Lived Underground," would be published by Viking. We now learn that it will appear in "Cross-Section," an anthology of new American writing, edited by Edwin Seaver, which will appear under the imprint of L. B. Fischer in the spring.