

Negroes --- and History

By **Doxey Wilkerson**

Now, as was true some 80 years ago, the extension of democracy for the Negro people is a basic requisite for the maintenance of democracy for the nation as a whole. Let this be a dominant note in the coming observances of Negro History Week.

The 1860's witnessed a life-and-death struggle between the oppressive slave economy of the plantation South and the progressive capitalist economy of the industrial North. Both were forced by inner compulsions to expand. Inevitably they collided.

The resultant struggle was destined to decide the fate of American democracy for generations to come, and the extension of democracy to the Negro people became the crucial political issue around which the entire conflict revolved.

After more than a year of vacillation and defeat, the democratic Union forces, led by Lincoln, were forced to free and arm the slaves in order to save the nation. The Union forces then triumphed, and they consolidated their victory by the further extension of democracy in the South.

The freedmen were made citizens and enfranchised. Democratic people's governments representing coalitions of poor whites, Negroes and abolitionists from the North, began to emerge in the Southern states. There was the perspective for the vigorous growth of democracy in the South.

1876-1877

The came the fateful days of 1876-77, when the Republican Party betrayed the democratic revolution which the forces around Lincoln had won. The Bourbon leaders of the Confederacy were restored to

Southern rule. Democracy was practically extinguished for both the white and Negro masses. The new democratic people's state governments were destroyed. And the nation as a whole was saddled with a long succession of reactionary Congressmen from the South, of whom the current John Rankin is but one of the most brazenly and disgustingly vicious.

The 1940's witness in our country another sharpening conflict between powerful forces of reaction and progress. The outcome this time will decide the fate of democracy in the world for generations to come—indeed, the fate of world civilization. And in this struggle, as during the Civil War, the extension of democracy to the Negro people is a crucial issue which may prove decisive.

Reaction is represented this time by the pro-fascist sector of American monopoly capital which seeks to give the imperialist answer to the post-war problem of how to utilize their tremendously expanded industrial plant. They would have our nation undertake the role which Hitler tried for Germany: conquest of foreign markets through military aggression abroad—after first having secured the "rear" by fascist oppression of the people here at home.

HERBERT HOOVER

Herbert Hoover is the chief political spokesman of this reactionary sector of monopoly capital, and its main concentration is in the Republican Party. Its immediate objective is to seize control of our government in 1944, and then to use America's tremendous economic and military power in an effort to dominate the world.

Progress is represented this time by the forces of labor and the people generally, in coalition with that democratic sector of monopoly capital which recoils from the prospect of another world war which

an aggressive American imperialism would surely bring. They would solve the problem of post-war markets by raising the living standards of the American masses and by the expansion of foreign trade in a world where peace has been secured through international co-operation on the basis of democratic national governments.

President Roosevelt is the chief political spokesman of this democratic sector of monopoly capital, and of the progressive forces of labor and the people generally. The Declaration of Tehran expresses the necessary foreign policy of this democratic coalition, and the President's message to Congress is its domestic counterpart. The urgent immediate goal is to strengthen democratic national unity for victory in the 1944 elections, thus to assure the implementation of both the Declaration of Tehran and the President's "Economic Bill of Rights."

In this current struggle between the forces of pro-fascist imperialism and the democratic coalition in support of Tehran, the role of 14,000,000 Negro people is of major importance. Now, as during an earlier crisis of American democracy, the Negro's firm alignment with the forces of progress is essential for the freedom of the nation as a whole.

The Negro people naturally belong in the democratic coalition of national unity—in support of President Roosevelt, of Tehran, of the Economic Bill of Rights. They can easily be won to active support of this coalition, but only through the extension of their democratic and social rights.

Now, as in the 1860's, the extension of democracy to the Negro people is part of the price, of democracy for the nation. Let us reflect upon this thought as we proceed during the next few days with our annual observance of Negro History Week.

