

Toward Freedom

A SOUTHERN white friend of mine is distressed over the virulent anti-Negroism so commonly expressed by the white masses in the south. Their deep, widespread and aggressive prejudices afford little basis for confidence, she fears, in a postwar perspective of enlarged freedom for the Negro people.

White housewives whose former cooks and maids now enjoy greater bargaining power in the labor market are said to be incensed at the "impertinent independence" of Negro domestics. They wait impatiently for the day when the war-boom collapses, vowing that they they will teach these Negro servants "the lesson they deserve."

Taxi drivers are said to entertain their white passengers with profane tirades against "these black ——" who are getting "so damned uppity." "A good lynching," they suggest, "would teach them to stay in their place."

And so it runs—on street cars and trains, over back fences, and even in the drawing rooms of comfortable white homes. Anti-Negroism, my southern white friend reports, is definitely on the up-surge throughout the south. She asks: "How can you be so confident of a progressive future?"

The answer lies in the fact that attitudes are not decisive, but are among the secondary factors of history; and further, that far more decisive progressive forces now emerging to-



By Doxey Wilkerson

ward dominance in the south are creating conditions under which traditional anti-Negro prejudices must necessarily tend to disintegrate—and will. Let us consider these propositions one at a time.

FIRST, attitudes (both "good" and "bad") are among the most unstable factors of history, and generally accommodate themselves to the changing necessities of time and place. Recall, for example, the bitter two-way hatred of Negro slaves and "poor whites" in the anti-bellum south. This mutual ill-will afforded no basis whatever for anticipating the working coalition of poor whites and freedmen who organized together the people's constitutional assemblies and reconstruction governments.

Recall also the pro-Negro attitudes of the northern bourgeoisie at a time when the strengthening of abolitionist sentiment happened to coincide with their economic interests. Once the political strangle-hold of slavocracy over the nation had been broken, however, the attitudes of these northern rulers of the young Republican Party turned to callous disregard for their erstwhile Negro friends, whom they left to the tender mercies of an emergent southern reaction.

SECOND, the "white supremacy" ideology over which my southern friend is so alarmed is but an artificial prop for Bourbon political rule and economic exploitation the

Attitudes Not Decisive In Shaping History

very foundations of which are now being shaken by deep fundamental changes which this war is accelerating in the South.

Both the white and the Negro masses are getting into motion. The Negroes are struggling ever more vigorously for full democratic rights. The whites, likewise, are struggling for greater economic and political democracy. Yet, although the oppression of both groups stems from the same basic source, only rarely do they now struggle together.

These movements of the southern Negro and white masses are still parallel; they are not yet integrated. But it is of the utmost importance that the two are now proceeding simultaneously (as has not always been true in recent history). There is good reason to expect that, in time, they will fuse.

THE Negroes are already coming to recognize the need for allies among the southern white masses. Witness, for example, the appeal of the new (all-Negro) Progressive Democratic Party of South Carolina for the collaboration of progressive white Democrats.

The whites, likewise, especially among the more advanced sections of organized labor, are coming to realize that their political goals are attainable only through collaboration with the southern Negro masses. Witness, for example, the work of CIO's Political Action Committee among southern Negro voters.

These still parallel people's movements will tend more and more to merge.

This is no mere prediction for the future. The process is now under way.