

Toward Freedom

A FORMER professional associate of mine, now a federal employee, sees no hope for the Negro people in the South. Like many Negro and other liberals who make a static approach to the problems of our society, he is completely overwhelmed by the still dominant crust of anti-Negro reaction, and hence useless in promoting progressive social change.

The college professor to whom I refer is profoundly discouraged by what he observed on a recent trip to Birmingham. Negro servicemen and civilians were being beaten and shot with impunity by the police. Federal war agencies had made their peace with the prevailing pattern of racial discrimination. Much-needed Negro war workers were being barred from essential employment.

The masses of white workers, even many in the CIO, were thoroughly saturated with the race hatred of the culture in which they live. The white supremacyites were organizing and were more aggressive than ever, vowing that never, no never, should Alabama Negroes vote or enjoy any other measure of "social equality."

"I tell you," said my friend, "there simply is no possible way to reconstruct the South from within. Why, it'll take a fascist revolution to bring about any important change."

When I asked whether he thought a fascist revolution would help free the Negro, he replied, "No, of course, it won't. But a change will have to come from some force from the



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outside; there is no way to bring it about from within."

I protested: "But look, my friend, you're in the depths of defeatism; you appear to see no way out." To which he retorted: "No, I don't." And he walked away—angry, hopeless, impotent.

My friend makes a basic error which is characteristic of many disillusioned liberals. He views the existing state of affairs as something that is, rather than as something which is in process of becoming. What he fails to see is really the most important thing in the picture; namely, that the social pattern of the South is not fixed and static, but is in process of flux. It is changing, changing ever more rapidly, before his very eyes.

FORMER plantation peasants are moving to the cities, throwing off the veil of ignorance which semi-serfdom imposes, and gaining a new perspective of their relations to the world.

Former agricultural workers are entering into the vast new industries which the war has brought forth. A southern proletariat is emerging, organizing and launching out on programs of political action. (Reps. Starnes and Dies, no less than Senators Pepper and Hill, have but recently experienced the effects upon their political careers.)

In the trade union movement, especially in the great industrial unions of the CIO, entirely new and progressive patterns of relationship are being forged between black workers and white. This is particularly true in Birmingham, where my friend saw nothing

Static Approach to a Changing World Means Impotence and Defeat

but reaction.

More than during any period in recent decades, the Negro people of the South are refusing to accept the caste patterns of tradition. Moved by the liberating impact of this people's war, they are fighting back—still not enough, but ever more and more; and they are winning victories. For example, the near victorious candidacy of a young Negro attorney for a seat on the Newport News, City Council so startled Virginia officialdom that they arranged, for the first time in recent history, for several Negro delegates to attend the state Democratic convention.

STILL further, new allies of the Negro people come forward, even in the South, to champion the extension of Negro freedom as an essential means of strengthening our embattled nation.

The rule of southern Bourbon reaction is now being challenged as never before since the Civil War. It is their very weakness and fears not their strength and confidence, that give rise to the blatant white supremacy cries with which they now seek to pollute the clearing political atmosphere.

It matters a great deal whether one fixes his gaze upon the still dominant, but already disintegrating, forces of reaction, or upon the new and emerging forces of progress which are definitely on the way to becoming dominant. The one leads to defeatism and despair; the other to confidence and effective struggle.

There is much to warrant confidence in the emergence of a new South today. Never since Reconstruction has there been so strong a progressive trend toward freedom. Never has there been a world setting more favorable for nurturing this trend into dominance.