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# THE NEGRO AND THE ELECTIONS

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**W**HETHER we move forward to complete victory in this war, and to the achievement of that enduring peace and world security promised at Teheran, indeed, whether there shall continue to be a free and democratic America, *may* be decisively determined by the votes of Negro citizens on November 7. Likewise, whether the notable wartime gains of the Negro people shall be consolidated and extended in the period after the war *will* be decisively determined by the outcome of the Presidential and Congressional elections this fall.

It is from both of these points of view that the masses of all Americans must now be led to understand the crucial role of the Negro people in the wartime elections of 1944.

## I

The military phase of the war hastens to its conclusion during the height of the election campaign. Both are a part of the same struggle—for the destruction of fascism and the building of abiding peace and security for all men. Both, therefore—on the battlefield and the home front—must be decisively won.

Our victories on the field of bat-

tle will mean little unless they are consolidated by policies and program consistent with the goals for which we fight. To assure that our country will continue to promote such policies and programs requires the election of the Roosevelt-Truman ticket and a progressive win-the-war, win-the-peace Congress. And this, in turn, requires the continued support of the vast majority of Negro voters for the Roosevelt Administration.

## *Potential Balance of Power*

The majority of the Negro voting population outside of the South is concentrated in a small number of great industrial cities—New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and a few others. As has been repeatedly demonstrated during recent years, this is politically a highly mature group of voters, especially alert to issues of especial concern to the Negro people. Moreover, this Negro vote is strategically located in states where the election contest is most closely drawn. It may well hold the balance of power in the coming elections.

Despite some of the misleading inferences of PM's recent analysis of "The Negro Vote in November" (August 13), its tabulations of po-

tential Negro voting strength in selected states correctly define the crucial importance of the Negro vote in the coming elections. That analysis showed that in each of eight states which could prove decisive in November (New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, New Jersey, Michigan, and Indiana), the potential Negro vote is larger than the margin of votes between Willkie and Roosevelt in the 1940 elections. These eight states control 202 electoral votes, more than three-fourths the number necessary to decide the Presidential contest.

It is by no means an exaggeration, therefore, to assert that the Negro vote may elect the next President of the United States. And considering the decisive role of our country in the war and post-war reconstruction, it is equally true that for the whole new perspective opened up to the world by the Anglo-Soviet-American concord at Teheran the vote of Negro Americans on November 7 will be a determining factor.

Thus, Negro voters in 1944 are not merely "another" group to be considered. They constitute one of the most important sectors of this electorate. As Eugene Dennis pointed out in "The Decisive Three Months" (*Daily Worker*, August 12): "As never before the Negro vote will be one of the decisive factors in the elections."

### *What Will Win the Negro Vote?*

Partisan propaganda seeks to build up the myth of a great shift of the Negro vote—from overwhelm-

ing support of Roosevelt (in increasing proportions during 1932, 1936 and 1940) to majority support for Dewey. Despite the defections of a few large Negro papers, there is no evidence of such a general shift in the Negro voting population. The truly outstanding leaders of the Negro people are overwhelmingly for the Roosevelt-Truman ticket, and pro-Roosevelt sentiment among the masses of Negro workers is even more pronounced.

Yet it would be a grave error for Roosevelt supporters to assume that the decisive Negro vote is "in the bag." That vote is increasingly non-partisan and independent. It can be guaranteed for Roosevelt and Truman only if serious attention is given to correcting the outstanding grievances of the Negro people and to clearing up the confusions being created by Republican propaganda. There are several main issues around which such efforts must center.

First, the recurring brutality of military and civilian police to Negro soldiers in the South, together with still existing and flagrant discriminations in the armed forces themselves, must quickly be stopped. There is no issue which more angers the Negro people than this. Despite the notable improvements the Roosevelt Administration has made in this regard, and despite the limitations which would face *any* administration at this time, clever propagandists can, and will, use this legitimate grievance of the Negro people as a means of channeling their political allegiance away from the administration in

power. The Roosevelt Administration must act, through both executive and legislative means, to remove this festering sore from the body of national unity. Progressive groups, and especially labor, must place agitation to this end in the very forefront of their programs.

Second, special measures must be adopted to meet the special problem faced by Negro workers during the period of reconversion. Most of the million or more Negro war workers have only limited seniority because of the racial bars that kept them from employment during the early stage of the war. For these Negroes, "the last hired" again to become "the first fired" when cut-backs are more general would be truly disastrous. This threat to their living standards might well lead to conflicts which would split the trade unions wide open on the racial issue, to riots and bloodshed in great industrial areas, and to a serious shift of Negro voting support from the Roosevelt Administration. In its own interests and in the larger interests of the nation, the trade union movement must come to grips with this problem and take the initiative in its solution. Some means must be devised, preferably through labor-management-government action, to prevent Negro workers from bearing a disproportionate share of the unemployment which the transitional period of reconversion is bound to bring.

Third, the trade union movement must throw its whole power into the destruction of Jim Crowism on the job and in the community. Thus can the unions best wipe out that

latent anti-Negroism among backward elements of their membership which lays organized labor and the nation open to such enemy attacks as in the recent transit strike in Philadelphia. Thus can the unions best unify their own ranks against the plots of race-baiting disrupters, and at the same time greatly enhance their bargaining effectiveness for all workers. Thus can the trade union movement most surely enlist the support of the Negro people in the campaign for the election of Roosevelt and Truman. Thus, truly, can labor rise unitedly in the discharge of its responsibilities as the backbone of the national unity.

Fourth, the anti-Negro poll-taxers in the Democratic Party must consistently be attacked as common enemies of the Roosevelt Administration and the nation. The concessions made to them by the Democratic National Convention must be frankly admitted, and then counterbalanced by the more substantial defeats they there received and *others they must receive in the months ahead*. Their unholy Congressional alliance with Hoover-Dewey Republicans must at every stage be revealed and assailed. Their vicious attacks upon the Negro people in the halls of Congress must be answered with such vigor and such consistency that they no longer come to pollute the atmosphere of our national legislature and sorely offend the Negro people and all decent Americans.

These tasks are but illustrative of the necessary approach to *assuring* overwhelming Negro support for the Roosevelt-Truman ticket in the fall

elections. This is no program here set forth solely "for the advancement of the Negro people." This is a program which now must be viewed as absolutely necessary for *the continued advancement of our nation and the world*. It must be undertaken as such by labor and the progressive forces generally who realize how basically essential the victory of Roosevelt in the fall elections is to assure that destruction of fascism and that enduring peace and security which the triumph of Allied arms on the field of battle have now brought almost within our grasp.

## II

What the coming elections mean for the future of Negro freedom and security can best be understood in the light of those influences which have advanced and retarded the Negro's struggle for this historic goal since the Civil War. Especially revealing are the Negro's experiences during the past (Roosevelt) decade.

### *Slavery, Freedom—Then New Forms of Oppression*

For more than three hundred years the Negro people have been struggling to destroy the bonds which make them less than free men. They fought back in numerous ways during the two and one-half centuries of slavery. They were a major force in preserving the Union and winning their own freedom during the Civil War. Together with new white allies in the progressive days of Reconstruction, they set out to build the first and only demo-

cratic people's state governments the South has ever known.

Then came the reaction of the late 1870's. Under the newly elected President Hayes, the Republican Party betrayed the democratic revolution which the forces around Lincoln had won, abandoning the Negro people to violent and "legal" subjugation by the leaders of the defeated Confederacy. The long and evil decades which followed left the Negro landless, disfranchised, thoroughly Jim Crowed, barred from all but the most menial and degrading employment, and with little or no opportunity for education.

The first real "break" in this semi-feudal oppression came during and after World War I, when one and three-fourths million Negroes left the South for the freer society and unprecedented industrial opportunities of the North. But even the new spark of hope then engendered was soon extinguished by post-war mass firings, race riots, lynchings, and the spread of Jim Crowism throughout the country. Even the inconsequential Republican Party of the South, through which Negro politicians dispensed patronage when the national G.O.P. was in power, was then purged of all but a few of its Negro leaders by the "lily-white" policy revived by President Hoover.

These setbacks for the Negro people were greatly intensified by the economic crisis of 1929. Three successive Republican administrations had sought to pyramid profits for the corporations at the expense of the living standards of the people, with the result that disaster con-

fronted the nation as a whole, and the conditions and perspectives of the Negro people became exceedingly grave indeed.

### *The Period of the Depression*

Not until the do-nothing policies of "Hooverism" were supplanted by the Roosevelt "New Deal" was there any reversal of this downward trend for the Negro people. Ever since then the Negro's march toward freedom and security has moved forward at an accelerating pace.

The policies of President Roosevelt during the depression years tremendously weakened and began the disintegration of the over-all entrenched pattern of American caste, thereby laying the basis for the rapid advances of the Negro peoples today. It is well to summarize the main achievements of the Roosevelt Administration during this period, for they are highly relevant to the election campaign of 1944.

First, the Roosevelt Administration greatly relieved what would otherwise have been the unbearable economic plight of the Negro people during the period of the depression. Millions of Negro citizens, who were hardest hit by unemployment and its attendant ills, obtained jobs, direct relief, decent housing, and home and farm security through such programs as P.W.A., W.P.A., N.Y.A., C.C.C., A.A.A., U.S.H.A., and F.S.A. Moreover, every one of these federal agencies introduced, with varying degrees of effectiveness, the explicit policy of no discrimination on account of race. They were unable to stamp out all discrimination, espe-

cially in the South, but they definitely decreased it. Thereby, they enormously enlarged the Negro's share in public services and established the all-important principle that Negro citizens, even in the South, are entitled to share equitably in the benefits of such federal programs.

Second, the Roosevelt Administration greatly advanced the educational opportunities of the Negro people. W.P.A.'s gigantic adult education program taught 400,000 Negroes to read and write and gave profitable employment to many thousands of Negro teachers, for whom it tried (with some success) to require salary scales equal to those of white teachers in the South. P.W.A. spent \$7,000,000 in Negro school building construction in the South, a tremendous advance despite the fact that white schools got proportionately more. Many thousands of Negro youth were enabled to continue their education through the highly equalitarian program of the N.Y.A., and Negro graduate students were provided special scholarship grants of a type not available to white students. The Agricultural Extension Service, the Farm Security Administration, and other agencies made similar substantial contributions to the education of the Negro people. (Incidentally, what would have been the crowning achievement in this regard—passage of the federal aid-to-education bill proposed by the President's Advisory Committee on Education, with absolute safeguards for Negro schools—was prevented only by the legislative trickery of

Senator Taft and his Republican colleagues.)

Third, the Roosevelt Administration markedly increased the employment of Negroes in federal service. Not only were appreciable gains made in white-collar and other higher paid categories, but (reversing the policies of the preceding Republican administrations) unprecedented numbers of well-qualified Negroes were appointed, on the basis of merit, to important administrative and policy-making positions in the federal government.

Fourth, the Roosevelt Administration introduced other basic social reforms of immense importance to the Negro people. Federal social security and minimum-wages-and-hours legislation brought benefits of major significance to the traditionally underpaid and insecure masses of Negro workers. Guarantees of collective bargaining rights and other enlightened labor policies fostered the growth of union membership from 3,000,000 to 14,000,000, furthered the integration of Negro workers into the labor movement (especially C.I.O.) — which has proved to be the staunchest ally of the Negro people—and made possible the increasing progressive influence of labor on the political life of the nation.

Fifth, the Roosevelt Administration gave birth to a new labor and progressive movement in the South, which is destined yet to destroy the centuries-old feudalistic controls that have so long oppressed the great masses of Negro Americans. Industrialization and agricultural reform are undermining the very

foundations of Bourbon rule. Thousands of federal appointees have brought a new type of public servant to the South, men and women of education and training whose primary concern is not to "keep the Negro in his place," but to advise and help him to a better life. The political influence of the poll-taxers on national policy (although still dangerous) has been lessened in numerous ways. Negroes and organized labor play an ever-increasing role in Southern politics. One by one, the most reactionary Southern diehards (Garner, Talmadge, Smith, Dies, Starnes, Reynolds, Caraway, etc.) are being eliminated from public life; and such new and progressive Southerners as Pepper, Hill, Arnall, and Fulmer are emerging into political prominence. The South is now in the process of a new Reconstruction, and the policies of the Roosevelt Administration during the depression laid the very foundations of this most salutary development for the Negro people.

These are basic and far-reaching achievements. It is no wonder that Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (the most fundamental and comprehensive study yet made of the "Negro problem") concludes:

"It can be generally ascertained that, as a result of the relative growth of the federal budget and the increased responsibility for and control of public services by federal agencies, discrimination has been decreasing during the New Deal" (p. 331).

And again:

"Not overlooking the considerable

discrimination against Negroes in the local administration of New Deal measures in the South, we must see that the New Deal has made a lasting break in Southern racial practices" (p. 463).

### *The Period of the People's War*

For the first time since the Hayes-G.O.P. betrayal of 1876, the policies of the first two Roosevelt administrations brought a decisive and sustained upward sweep of the curve of social progress for the Negro people. The trend then initiated has been tremendously accelerated by the win-the-war policies of the third Roosevelt administration during the period of the anti-Axis war.

A million or more Negro men and women now earn good wages in war jobs in most of which only white workers were employed before. The unprecedented and bitterly fought Fair Employment Practices Committee (F.E.P.C.) continues to pry open new employment opportunities for the Negro people—and, as during the recent transit strike in Philadelphia, is backed up solidly by President Roosevelt in every one of its successive crises. Equal Negro-white wage scales have been established by W.P.B. Hundreds of thousands of Negro unionists are forging new bonds of comradeship with their white fellow workers on the production lines and in the political arena.

Despite still existing discriminations and abuse, Negroes are fighting gloriously for their country in every branch of the armed services. Progressively, the most flagrant discriminations are being destroyed—

in the Merchant Marine, Navy, Air Corps, WACS, and Army Nurse Corps. Those that remain must be fought against with all the power the progressive forces of our nation can muster. Not only *ought* they go, but with the strengthening of the Roosevelt Administration they *can* be wiped off the face of America.

Traditional Jim Crow bars in public places are being subjected to tremendous strain, even in the South. A Negro is appointed White House Correspondent, another to the staff of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, another as Assistant National Chairman of the National Democratic Party. The "white primary" has been declared unconstitutional by the U. S. Supreme Court, and a veritable political renaissance is under way among Negro voters in the South. A Negro Communist is elected to the City Council of New York, and another New York Negro wins primary election contests for nomination to Congress on the tickets of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the American Labor Party!

There remain many dastardly slave survivals still to be destroyed. Negro boys in uniform still suffer gross indignities and abuse. Racial barriers to employment still abound. The rotten Bourbon oligarchy which controls the South still fights desperately to bolster up its tottering rule, even to the extent of trying to destroy F.E.P.C. and challenging the decree of the highest court of the land that Negroes must be allowed to vote in the heretofore

"white primaries" of the southern states. Complete freedom still lies far ahead, and can be achieved only through firm unity and struggle of the Negro people in alliance with labor and other pro-Roosevelt forces of the nation. But the truly substantial gains which the Negro people have made under the wartime Roosevelt Administration are the most significant strides forward since that brief and promising decade following the Civil War.

### *The Elections and the Post-war Period*

Now, as this war hastens to its conclusion, the Negro stands on the threshold of a new era of freedom and security. For the first time in the history of our country, it is now possible to foresee in the near future the achievement of full democratic rights for the Negro people. *Will that perspective actually be realized in the years immediately ahead?* This is a basic issue which the fall elections will do more than anything else to decide.

What are the alternatives which confront Negro voters in the fall elections?

On the one hand, they can continue their support for the Roosevelt Administration and the policies with which it is identified. Those policies include:

1. The speedy defeat of our Axis enemies and the complete destruction of fascism (the basic requirements for peace in the world, and especially for the very survival of minority racial groups):

2. The strengthening of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition to

hasten victory and lay a solid basis for a cooperative United Nations world organization which has both the will and the power to guarantee enduring peace and progressively enlarged freedom for all men (without which there is no possibility of freedom and security for the Negro people);

3. Increased *federal* planning and administration over such social functions of government as full post-war employment, unemployment insurance, public housing and health services, etc. (the only practical means of preventing the gross anti-Negro discrimination which control of these programs by southern states would surely bring);

4. Strengthening the labor unions as the backbone of democratic national unity, and (quoting Earl Browder's *Teheran—Our Path in War and Peace*, p. 85) "further uniting them, and securing their participation in all public affairs up to and including national and international policy-making and administration" (thus giving added power to the staunchest ally of the Negro in his struggle for full democratic rights);

5. Further stimulation of southern industrialization and agricultural reform (which will destroy the economic base of the oppressive feudalistic oligarchy now in control of the South);

6. Support for the growing labor and progressive movement in the South (which is necessary in order to retire from public life the poll-tax enemies of both the President and the Negro people);

7. Extension of the franchise in



the South (by enforcement of the Supreme Court "white primary" ban and Congressional repeal of the poll-tax barriers in the immediate future);

8. Progressive elimination of anti-Negro discrimination in the armed forces (despite the strenuous opposition with which the major steps already taken were met);

9. Continued strengthening of F.E.P.C. and other direct anti-discrimination policies and programs (which the Roosevelt Administration first introduced into twentieth-century America—with inestimable benefit to the Negro people); and

10. Further extension and expression of the fundamental principle that the primary function of government is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the common man.

It is precisely this philosophy of government and these policies which revived the forward march of the Negro people during the period of the New Deal, and which gave it added impetus and strength during the period of the anti-fascist war. It is Roosevelt, the author of these policies, and the progressive labor and other groups by which he is supported that can best be counted on to consolidate and extend the recent progress which the Negro people have made toward their historic goal of full democratic rights.

On the other hand, the Negro people can swing their support to Dewey and the policies with which (insofar as can be determined from the character of his backers and his ultra-cautious and contradictory pronouncements) his administration

would be identified. Those policies include:

1. Narrow partisan disruption of the war effort with probable appeasement and "negotiation" with our fascist enemies (which is what brings Dewey the support of such native pro-fascists as Hearst, McCormick, and Gerald L. K. Smith);

2. Disruption of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition on the phony pretext of protecting the interests of "small nations" (which would thus strengthen the hand of the most reactionary sections of American imperialists who seek to dominate the world, and who would precipitate thereby another and even more disastrous world war);

3. State control over unemployment insurance, social security and other social functions of government (which is the thing that endears Dewey to the southern poll-taxers who stop at nothing in order to defeat Roosevelt and return the Negro to his pre-New Deal subjection);

4. Weakening the influence of organized labor in public affairs and in collective bargaining (thus assuring greater profits for the corporations, lowered living standards for the workers, and added strength for the pro-fascist forces within our country);

5. Maintaining a feudalistic South (which can serve as a sort of semi-colonial source of cheap raw materials for the industrial North);

6. Strengthening the Bourbon poll-tax rule in the South (as a means of defeating the "New Reconstruction" set into motion by the Roosevelt Administration);

7. Demagogic double-talk about improving the lot of the Negro people (while the deeds of Dewey and his supporters are effectively knifing the Negro and all that he cherishes in the back); and

8. Revival of the Hoover policy of a rough-rider government for the benefit of those who own the nation's wealth—and the rest of the people be damned.

It is precisely this philosophy of government and these policies which most seriously endanger the Negro's prospects of continued progress toward freedom and security during and after the war. It is the small stature and big ambitions of men like Dewey, and the even more sinister forces of reaction which now rally to his support, that would check and sharply reverse the current trend toward the Negro's historic goal of full democratic rights.

Thomas E. Dewey has all the qualifications of a President Hayes, and could be relied upon to repeat in 1945 the Republican betrayal of 1876, which consigned the Negro people to seven long decades of degradation and abuse.

Franklin D. Roosevelt has *demonstrated* over a period of more than a decade his unswerving purpose to strengthen democracy and economic security for the masses of Americans in general, and to use the power of government progressively to destroy the special economic and social and political bonds which shackle the Negro people.

Let the reactionary or unthinking political propagandists shout all they will about an alleged swing of the Negro vote to Dewey. Let cer-

tain Negro papers prostitute their social mission for whatever material or other rewards they may obtain for their services to the G.O.P. The coming elections will prove all this to have been in vain.

The masses of Negroes who cast their ballots on November 7 will speak for a people whose experiences during the "New Deal" and the wartime Roosevelt Administrations—and before!—have brought them to a high level of political maturity. They can no longer be fooled by double-talk; their vote cannot be bought; and they have nothing but contempt for the Negro party hacks who now seek to guide them to their own disaster.

These three million Negro voters naturally belong in the Roosevelt-Truman camp in the coming elections. They know that the Roosevelt Administration and the labor movement from which it gains major support have done more to advance Negro freedom than any influence since the dark days following Reconstruction. Their normal inclination is to support that national leadership which has proved to be their staunchest friend. This decisive Negro vote actually *can* be won for the Roosevelt-Truman ticket—and it *must* be won if the strong progressive, democratic trend now emerging in our nation and the world is to be strengthened until effective dominance is achieved.

The goal of peace and security for the world, through achievement of the Teheran objectives, and the goal of freedom for the Negro people through attainment of full democratic rights, have now be-

come inseparably merged. Each is dependent upon the other, and both are fundamentally at stake in the fall elections. It is important that the Negro people be led fully to understand that the continued national leadership of the Roosevelt Administration is absolutely essential for the consolidation and extension of their wartime gains. It is even more important that labor and the other pro-Roosevelt forces of the country come quickly to understand that the attainment of the democratic goals which they seek now requires vigorous and incessant struggle, in firm unity with the Negro people, to destroy the Jim Crow curse on America which in this period of history has come to imperil the peace and security of the entire world.

### *The Task of the Communists*

The national and world importance of assuring maximum support for the Roosevelt-Truman ticket in the fall elections by the crucial millions of Negro voters poses a special task for Marxists. It is a task which gains added significance from the fact that it comes just at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Communist organization in our country.

Marxists have always understood better than any group in our society the fundamental necessity of unity between white and Negro Americans for the freedom and security of both and of the nation as a whole. The famous Civil War dictum of Karl Marx—"Labor with a white skin cannot be free where labor in a black skin is branded"—

has ever been a controlling premise underlying the program of the Communist organization.

Now, as these national elections and this anti-Axis war of which they are a part hasten to their conclusion, our country has greater need than ever before for the fullest possible expression of the principle of Negro-white unity in the interests of winning the war for the utter destruction of fascism. And it is the Marxists within the camp of national unity who must assume it as a major responsibility to help all the democratic forces of the nation translate that principle into life.

The task we now face is far greater than was Scottsboro or the hundreds of other instances in which Communists have struggled against the Jim-Crow threat to the welfare of all Americans. The task of uniting the Negro people with labor and the progressive movement generally to assure that the Roosevelt policies of national and United Nations unity will continue to guide our country is now the task of guaranteeing that the whole new perspective that this liberating war and the concord of Teheran have brought into being is actually achieved in the difficult period of struggle ahead.

Let Communists approach the question of "The Negro and the Elections" with full appreciation of the crucial importance of the contribution they, of all others, are best equipped to make. There could be no more fitting way to observe the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Communist organization in the United States.