

FREEDOM— THROUGH VICTORY IN WAR AND PEACE

By DOXEY A. WILKERSON

THE NEGRO WANTS to be free. He wants freedom from every form of discrimination on account of race or color. He wants complete economic, political and social equality—in short, full democratic rights.

The Negro has always wanted—and fought for—his freedom. The past three centuries of Negro life in America record the unceasing struggles of the Negro people toward freedom. At times they have moved rapidly toward that goal, at times slowly or not at all, and at times they have been pushed backward toward greater subjection. But always the Negro people have struggled, and their goal has remained the same—complete freedom.

Now, in this period of unprecedented social and political change, the Negro people are struggling ever more vigorously for their freedom. They are fighting with the renewed confidence which this great liberating war has brought to the millions of “little people” the world over. They are fighting with the help of new and powerful allies which the national peril has brought to their side. They now move more rapidly toward freedom than at any time during the past seventy years. And they shall attain their goal of full democratic rights—far sooner than many people think.

There can be no doubt as to “What the Negro Wants.” The crucial question now is: *How attain it?* How, during this period, can the progress of the Negro people toward freedom be most

effectively advanced? This is the question to which the remainder of this discussion is addressed.

THE NEGRO AND THE NATION

The success of the Negro's struggles toward freedom has always been influenced decisively by the dominant economic and political trends in the nation as a whole. It is well to recall this historical relationship, for it holds the key to correct strategy and tactics in the continuing struggles of today.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was the increasing demand for more and more unpaid labor for the expanding cotton plantations of the South that led to the tearing of millions of African natives from their homelands and their enslavement on American soil. Similarly, it was the declining value of cotton production and the upsurge of democratic fervor during the American Revolution—in which Negro patriots fought gloriously—that led to the weakening of the slave system during the late 18th century. Oppressive restrictions on the slaves tended to be relaxed, the system itself seemed on the way out, and there ensued a period which Dr. Carter G. Woodson calls “the hey-day of victory for the ante-bellum Negro.”

Following invention of the cotton gin and other technological developments, it was the tremendously rapid expansion of the now more profitable plantation system that led to the striking revival of the illegal slave trade during the first half of the 19th century. Earlier tendencies toward a paternalistic slavery gave way to an increasingly harsh and institutionalized system for the oppression of the then more enlightened, and hence more rebellious, slaves.

The 1860's witnessed a life-and-death struggle between the oppressive slave economy of the plantation South and the emerging and progressive capitalist economy of the industrial North. Both were forced by inner compulsions to expand. Inevitably they collided, giving rise to a struggle which was destined to decide the fate of American democracy—and hence, the status of the Negro people—for generations to come.

The North entered the Civil War with no intention to free

the slaves. "Save the Union" was the slogan behind which it sought to rally the people for struggle. But after a year and a half of vacillation and defeat, the democratic Union forces, led by Lincoln, were compelled to free and arm the slaves in order to save the nation. What had begun as a war with limited democratic goals was transformed through historic necessity into a truly revolutionary war of liberation.

Only then did the Union forces triumph, and they sought to consolidate their victory through 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 prospect for the vigorous growth of democracy in the South.

Then came the fateful days of 1876-77, when the Republican party of the Northern bourgeoisie deserted the Negro people and betrayed the democratic revolution which the forces around Lincoln had won. The former Confederate slave-masters were restored to power. Ku Klux Klan terror and "white supremacy" propaganda were used to separate the Negroes and their allies. As a result, the forward march of democracy in the South was checked and reversed. An era of semi-feudalism took its place.

In the long, oppressive decades which followed the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877, reaction again became thoroughly entrenched in power. The Negro people were disfranchised, intimidated, and forced back into a caste-like status which was but little different from that of slavery. The masses of poor whites, likewise, were deprived of their lands, disfranchised, and removed from effective participation in government. The new democratic people's governments were destroyed. The new state systems of free public schools promptly declined.

Moreover, democracy in our nation as a whole suffered directly from this triumph of reaction in the South. For example, our national Congress became saddled with a long succession of southern reactionaries whose political crimes against the American people are buttressed and made possible by the poll tax disfranchisement laws of the late 19th century period.

From even this brief, incomplete summary, the relevant historical lesson should be clear: In unity with powerful allies and aided by progressive economic and political trends, the Negro people have moved forward to greater freedom, and democracy for the nation as a whole has been advanced. However, when separated from their allies and confronted with reactionary economic and political trends, the Negro people have been defeated in their struggles toward freedom, and democracy for the nation as a whole has been severely retarded. *This is a fundamental lesson of history which Negro and all other progressive Americans must now come more fully to understand.*

The 1940's witness another sharpening conflict between powerful forces of reaction and progress, the outcome of which will decide the fate of democracy in our country and the world for generations to come. In this struggle, as during the 1860's, the freedom goal of the Negro people is again inseparably bound up with the survival goal of the nation as a whole. The attainment of both depends fundamentally upon victory over the fascist enemies of our nation and the organization of a just and durable peace.

It follows that effective struggles for Negro freedom today must be undertaken within the framework of the nation's struggle for survival. The crucial issue of this discussion, *how to attain "What the Negro Wants,"* must be resolved, therefore, in terms of the Negro's relations to the larger struggles which now confront our nation and the world.

NEGRO FREEDOM REQUIRES VICTORY FOR THE NATION

During the early stages of our country's war with the Axis, there were widespread doubts among the Negro people as to what this conflict could possibly mean to them. These doubts were commonly expressed in such terms as: "Why fight fascism in Germany when we have fascism right here in America?"; or, "This is a white man's war in which the Negro has no stakes"; or, "It's good to see those little brown Japanese giving the whites the good beating they deserve." These were understandable

emotional reactions of many Negroes who had grown bitter over continued denials of freedom in a nation they had given so much to build and defend. But the fallacies inherent in such expressions have now become apparent to most people.

It is now generally clear that the oppression suffered by Negro Americans, thoroughly unjust though it is, still represents something far removed from fascism. There is a fundamental qualitative difference between a government which deliberately proclaims the inherent inferiority of minority racial groups and uses the full power of the State to starve, murder and enslave them as a matter of "principle"; and a government whose theoretical foundations are democratic, which moves far too slowly—and at times not at all—to assure avowed democratic rights for its racial minorities, but which still provides the legal framework in which oppressed racial groups can struggle toward freedom—and win. It is the difference between hopeless slavery or extermination, on the one hand, and substantial opportunity progressively to enlarge the area of freedom, on the other.

It is now generally clear too that the welfare of the Negro in this war is inextricably bound up with that of the nation as a whole. The Negro is in this conflict, whether he willed it or not. Far from being a "white man's war" upon which the Negro people might look with detached neutrality, it is a mortal struggle in which the lives and destinies of both white and black are inseparably linked.

It is now generally clear also that color affords no bond of kinship between the Japanese war-lords and the Negro people. In China, the Philippines, and elsewhere, it has been well demonstrated that the fascist rulers of Japan are quite as brutal and thorough in their oppression of "colored peoples" as are their "master race" colleagues in Germany.

In short, the Negro people now know that an Axis victory would blast all hope for their freedom. It would subject our entire nation to the bestial policies of fascist oppression; and of all Americans, the Negro people would suffer most. Extermination would be their probable lot—or, at "best," a slavery more brutal and degrading than their forefathers ever knew.

Although the threat of an Axis victory to Negro freedom is now clear, there is far from adequate appreciation of the more imminent threat of a long, drawn-out war, ending in a "negotiated peace." There is now little likelihood of an Axis military victory. The more probable alternatives are an early and decisive victory for the United Nations, accompanied by unconditional surrender of the Axis and the complete destruction of fascist governments; or a prolonged war, leading to a military stalemate, and finally ending through the signing of peace treaties by the belligerent governments. Which of these alternatives is consistent with the freedom goal of the Negro people?

There is a curious notion, widely accepted in the Negro community, that the freedom of the Negro people would be furthered by prolonged extension of the war. It is frequently expressed in connection with some wartime improvement—or set-back—in the Negro's social-economic conditions, and is reflected by such statements as: "Lord, don't let this war end too soon." It rests upon the naïve assumption that since the war is now advancing the cause of Negro freedom, then more and more war should bring more and more freedom to the Negro people. There is a deceptive and dangerous fallacy in this argument which must be thoroughly exposed if wartime struggles for Negro democratic rights are to achieve maximum results.

It is Hitler and Tojo and their helpers in our country—and they alone—who would profit from a long, drawn-out war. Moreover, if their program were to prevail, the prospect for Negro freedom would be completely destroyed.

Just as there was a reactionary group of northern "Copperheads" who conspired to defeat the Union cause during the Civil War, so there is now a powerful clique of American defeatists and imperialists who are doing everything in their power to disrupt the war effort of our nation. They want to save Hitler and his fascist regime from defeat and destruction; and their basic strategy is to prolong the war.

Let none be misled into thinking that this "long-war" clique has any interest in advancing Negro freedom. Rather, they are the deadliest enemies of the Negro and all other freedom-loving peoples. Their goal is nothing less than a dominant and aggressive

American imperialism in the post-war world, supported by a domestic fascism here at home.

The tactics of this imperialist clique become more apparent every day. They employ every trick of demagoguery to sabotage the win-the-war program of our Commander-in-Chief. They strive to create antagonisms within the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition, and to prolong the war by delaying the opening of the Second Front. They seek to substitute a "negotiated peace" for the Allied policy of "unconditional surrender." They hope to preserve fascist governments in Germany and the rest of Europe as a bulwark against the democratic upsurge of liberated peoples. They expect, thus, to establish the most favorable conditions for the rise of a fascist-imperialist regime in America.

This pro-fascist, imperialist clique consists of the most reactionary sections of American monopoly capital. Its chief political spokesman is Herbert Hoover. Its *main* concentration is in the Republican Party, although it has powerful adherents in both major parties. Its main propaganda channel is the Hearst-McCormick-Patterson newspaper axis. Its immediate objective is to seize control of our government in 1944.

Should this defeatist cabal win in the 1944 elections, their ultimate plans for our nation would immediately become clear to all. They would try to lead our nation along the path which Hitler tried for Germany: conquest of foreign markets through military aggression abroad. But first, in order to keep the people from upsetting their plans, they would try to establish oppressive, fascist controls over our country.

This is why these Hoover-Republican appeasers and defeatists are doing everything in their power to disrupt the war effort and delay victory. This is why they attempt even to disfranchise our fighting men in the Army as a means toward winning the 1944 elections. They fear a quick and decisive Allied victory, for they know it would blast their dream of a fascist America moving toward the imperialist domination of the world. They want a long, drawn-out war, for they know this would give Hitler time to rally and make a successful bid for a "negotiated peace," thus leaving fascist regimes virtually intact in Europe and strengthening the forces of reaction in America and throughout the world.

These fascist-imperialist advocates of a long, drawn-out war are the common enemies of the Negro people and the nation. If they were to succeed in carrying through their program of reaction, the Negro's wartime gains would be engulfed and destroyed in the on-rush of American fascism, and the people as a whole would lose their liberty.

Quite apart from the dire political threat of this "long war" program to the freedom of the Negro and the nation, just think of the human suffering which prolongation of this war would bring. It would mean many more years of murder and slaughter of additional millions of men, women and children throughout the world. It would mean the further destruction of homes and factories and villages and cities. It would mean years longer before our sons and fathers and sweethearts in the armed forces could return home—and many more of them would never return.

This is the conspiracy into which any general acceptance of "long-war" propaganda would lead the Negro people. Nothing would more surely defeat the Negro's wartime struggles toward freedom.

The future of Negro freedom depends upon the triumph of the democratic win-the-war forces which are rallying in support of our Commander-in-Chief, and the defeat of the imperialist-appeaser bloc which now struggles for political supremacy. A long war would enhance the danger of a "negotiated peace" with fascism; it would enormously strengthen the reactionary enemies of the Negro people. An early victory would assure the unconditional surrender of the Axis and the destruction of fascist governments; it would tremendously strengthen the democratic labor and progressive forces who are the most effective allies of the Negro people.

It should be clear that the developing struggle for the unity of all progressive, win-the-war forces in America—in support of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition for the quickest possible destruction of our Axis enemies—is fundamentally a struggle which the Negro and all other freedom-loving peoples must support. Along the path of victory for our nation and our allies, and along this path alone, can successful struggles for Negro freedom now proceed.

VICTORY FOR THE NATION REQUIRES
GREATER NEGRO FREEDOM

The implications of this war for the freedom of the Negro people do not arise solely from the negative threat of an Axis victory or a negotiated peace. Even more fundamental are the positive liberating tendencies which emerge from the progressive nature of the conflict. The democratic forces which this people's war has set into motion and continues to strengthen warrant full confidence in the further extension of Negro democratic rights.

This perspective of continued progress toward Negro freedom is rejected by many persons in our national life. Typical are the apparently divergent viewpoints of certain discouraged liberals and militant reactionaries. The thinking of both proceeds from a common defeatist error.

On the one hand, there are those Negroes and liberal white friends of the Negro who are so overwhelmed by the still existing crust of racial prejudice that they have lost all perspective, and with it all hope for a democratic America. They point with despair at the thousand and one anti-Negro discriminations in civil and military life. Despondently, they inquire: "If they treat Negroes this way in the very midst of the war, what hope is there for a progressive future?"

On the other hand, there are those die-hard reactionaries who loudly proclaim their everlasting allegiance to the principle of "white supremacy." They fight against every move to extend the boundaries of Negro freedom, and even jeopardize the war-time interests of the nation in their zeal to maintain the racial *status quo*. They are determined to "keep the Negro in his place."

The basic error of these two points of view, and the thing which unites them in a common defeatist outlook regarding Negro freedom, is their static approach to the social problems of this day. Both the despondent liberal and the militant reactionary fail to grasp what is really the most significant fact in the whole picture: our social pattern is not fixed and static, but is in process of flux. It is changing—*changing rapidly*. The nation's imperative requirements of victory in this war are subjecting the traditional

fetters of the Negro people to terrific strain. One by one, the old bonds are breaking. A new and freer pattern of society is definitely in process of formation.

Negroes of little hope—and die-hard reactionaries too, for that matter—would do well to emulate the consistently dynamic approach of Frederick Douglass to the problem of Negro freedom in his day. He was quick to probe beneath the prevailing, but decaying, crust of reaction, and to seize upon the new and emerging forces of progress which he helped to nurture until they became dominant.

Douglass was under no illusions about the motives of the dominant forces in conflict at the start of the Civil War. He remarked that the war began “in the interests of slavery on both sides. The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union, and the North fighting to keep it in the Union; the South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution, and the North fighting for the old guarantees;—both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro.”

Throughout the early stages of the war, when the Union forces suffered defeat after defeat from the Confederate armies, Douglass repeatedly urged Lincoln to free and arm the slaves. In his speeches he pointed out that the Union's cause would be victorious only when it took on an anti-slavery character, when it mobilized the Negro people on its side. Although his faith was often sorely tried, he continued to insist that the historic “mission of the war was the liberation of the slave.”

When finally Lincoln did issue the Emancipation Proclamation, with its limited liberation of the slaves of the Confederate states, as a military necessity only, Douglass quickly realized that the imperatives of that developing situation would necessarily lead to the complete freeing of his people. He said: “I took the proclamation, first and last, for a little more than it purported, and saw in its spirit a life and power far beyond its letter. Its meaning to me was the entire abolition of slavery.”

Even in the midst of the whirl of events of that period, Douglass correctly foresaw, *and struggled to achieve*, the transformation of the Civil War into an all-out abolition war for the freedom of his people. It was the new and developing forces of history,

not those in process of decline, to which Douglass applied his energies. Herein lay a major source of his strength.

So, likewise, in his appeals to Negro men to take up arms in support of the Union cause, Frederick Douglass constantly emphasized the *changing* character of the War and the necessity for *struggle* to hasten this process of change. Thus, in his stirring appeal to the Negro people of New York, "Men of Color—to Arms!" just two months after the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass' attention was focused, not alone on the existing state of affairs, but even more upon what it was in process of becoming. He declared:

With every reverse to the national arms, with every exulting shout of victory raised by the slaveholding rebels, I have implored the imperiled nation to unchain against her foes her powerful black hand. Slowly and reluctantly that appeal is beginning to be heeded. Stop not now to complain that it was not heeded sooner . . . This is not the time to discuss that question. . . . Action! action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows. The office of speech now is only to point out when, where, and how to strike to the best advantage.

There is no time to delay. The tide is at its flood that leads on to fortune. . . . the sky is written all over, "NOW OR NEVER." . . . "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow."

In a similar address to the Negro people of Philadelphia in July, 1863, Douglass hammered away, again and again, at the changed and still changing relations of the Negro people to the nation as a whole.

Now, what is the attitude of the Washington government toward the colored race? What reasons have we to desire its triumph in the present contest? Mind, I do not ask what was its attitude before this bloody rebellion broke out. . . . I do not even ask what it was two years ago, when McClellan shamelessly gave out that in a war between loyal slaves and disloyal masters, he would take the side of the masters against the slaves. . . . These were all dark and terrible days for the republic. I do not ask you about the dead past. I bring you

the living present. *Events more mighty than men, eternal Providence, all-wise and all-controlling, have placed us in new relations to the government and the government to us.*

It is revealing to continue this quotation from Douglass' Philadelphia address, and to paraphrase in terms of the events of the present day.

"What that government is to us today, and what it will be tomorrow, is made evident by a very few facts. Look at them, colored men." Hundreds of thousands of Negro men and women are now perfecting skills and earning good wages in industrial employment from which they have traditionally been barred. Many thousands more find new expression for their talents in federal jobs where no black face has ever been seen before.

For the first time in the history of our country, a special agency of the federal government—the Committee on Fair Employment Practices—has been created for the purpose of blasting all remaining racial bars to the full employment of our people. Despite continued attacks from reaction, the President continues to fight for FEPC and to see it through each succeeding crisis. Also for the first time in history, another agency of our government—the War Labor Board—has handed down the unprecedented decision that the wages of white and Negro workers shall be equal.

One by one, the Jim Crow cafeterias in federal buildings in the nation's capital are being eliminated, and the few that remain are sure to go. The Presidents of the Republics of Liberia and of Haiti, black men, are greeted with all the ceremony and respect that the White House can command.

The Supreme Court of the United States completely reverses its position of a decade ago and hands down the historic decision that black men must be allowed to cast their ballots in the heretofore "white primaries" of the southern states. Despite the mediocrity which sits in the office of the Attorney General, the Department of Justice now moves, where it has heretofore refused, to wipe out the dual curse of peonage and lynching. Have no fear, the Attorney General will yet move to protect the rights of our people to vote in the states of the South.

In the armed forces of our nation, Negro men are fighting for their liberty in every branch of the service. A black man holds the post of Brigadier-General. Black men and white—in the good state of Georgia, mind you—pursue *together* their studies for officer's training on a basis of complete equality. Negro heroes are driving tanks and manning the great guns which spell disaster for our enemies. Negro pursuit flyers are giving a brilliant performance in the air, and other black men are now being trained as bombardiers. The Army's laggard Judge Advocate has relaxed, at long last, the traditional bars against Negro lawyers. In the United States Merchant Marine, white and Negro crews sail their Liberty Ships through submarine-infested seas under the command of Negro captains. Even though with reluctance and ill-grace, the Secretary of Navy has been forced not only to admit black men into the ranks of fighting seamen, but also to train them as officers.

Steps are taken toward the entrance of Negro players into organized baseball. A Negro journalist is appointed for the first time to the post of White House Correspondent. Twenty national Negro organizations unite in a manifesto declaring their support of the war and the independence of Negro voters as a political force in the nation. A Negro Communist is elected to the Council of the City of New York.

More than this, our people are finding new friends and allies in their wartime struggles for greater freedom. A Vice President of the United States insists, on one occasion: "There can be no privileged peoples"; and on another occasion calls for abolition of the poll-tax fetters upon our franchise, declaring: "Every citizen of the United States, without regard to color or creed... is entitled to cast his vote." An Under-Secretary of State proclaims: "Our victory must bring in its train the liberation of all peoples." An Eleanor Roosevelt, a Pearl Buck, a Wendell Willkie, and many others boldly throw their influence toward the further liberation of our people. The Atlanta Conference of Southern white liberals extends the hand of friendship and collaboration to the Durham Conference of Southern Negro leaders. The editor of an influential Richmond, Virginia, daily newspaper calls for

the abolition of Jim Crow seating arrangements on street cars and buses—and gets an overwhelmingly favorable response from the public.

In the trade unions of our nations, especially in the great, democratic, industrial unions of the CIO, new bonds of comradeship are being forged between black workers and white. The power of organized labor is being thrown ever more frequently and effectively toward extending the democratic rights of the Negro people.

Negro Americans: These are but part of the changes now taking place in the relations of our people to our country. "The revolution is tremendous, and it becomes us as wise men to recognize the change and to shape our action accordingly."

Thus would Frederick Douglass address the Negro people of wartime America in 1944. He would see, not a static society of fixed racial discriminations and injustices, but a tremendously dynamic society in process of flux. He would see our nation, impelled by the necessities of a war it has simply got to win, moving more and more to extend the boundaries of freedom for the Negro people. He would look to the future with confidence.

It is important to emphasize that the Negro's wartime strides toward freedom are made possible by the inherently progressive nature of the conflict in which we are engaged. Henry Wallace says that it is continuation of the 150-year-old "People's Revolution," that it issues in the "Century of the Common Man."¹ Sumner Welles characterizes it as "A People's War."² Wendell Willkie calls it "A War of Liberation."³ Earl Browder says it is "A People's War for National Liberation."⁴

These are not mere expressions of the ideals and hopes of "good men," but rather the realistic descriptions and interpretations of competent observers of world politics. The basic ideas they all seem to hold in common can be summarized in a few simple propositions: (1) Whatever may have been its origins,

¹ Address before the Free World Association, New York City, May 8, 1942.

² Memorial Day Address, May 30, 1942.

³ *One World*, (New York, 1943).

⁴ *Victory and After* (New York, 1942), Chapter 1.

this war has taken on the character of a life and death struggle for liberation on the part of nations now suffering the brutalities of Axis enslavement, and for survival on the part of other nations threatened with a similar fate. (2) It is not merely a war between opposing armies, but a war in which whole peoples are actively involved. (3) Because of the character of the forces in combat and the tremendous stakes at issue, this war has profoundly stirred the deep-seated, freedom-loving sentiments of the peoples of the earth, and has set them into motion. In the words of Vice President Wallace in his memorable "Free World Victory" address, "The people's revolution is on the march, and the devil and all his angels cannot prevail against it."

No undue significance is here ascribed to the wartime proclamations of statesmen as such. Their prophecies of a freer world to come are not important primarily because *they* make them. Rather, their importance arises from the fact that the liberating *policies* to which they give expression are "*dictated by the necessities of war, that they are necessary preconditions for Victory, for national survival.*"⁵ A few illustrations should suffice to make this premise clear.

China, the traditional prey of imperialist powers the world over, now sits as an equal on the Pacific War Council. There is every reason for confidence that her change of status among the nations of the world is permanent. It came about not through the benevolence of her allies, but because a strong, fighting, and united China is a basic requirement for their own survival in this death-struggle with the Axis foe. For precisely the same reason, the immediate post-war independence of the Philippines is now assured, and the liberation of Puerto Rico will yet be the order of the day.

The bitter lessons of the Malayan Peninsula and of Burma were not completely in vain. Even though slowly, the Allies are being forced to realize that, in this war, colonial peoples are more than pawns to be fought over; that the active support of the colonial masses is an indispensable requirement of victory. In Southeast Asia, in India, even in Africa, the liberating influence of this hard fact will yet find concrete expression.

⁵ Browder, *op. cit.*

So it is with the Negro's wartime march toward freedom. In the course of this inherently progressive people's war, the further extension of democracy for the Negro has become an imperative necessity for national survival. Not only has our country been forced increasingly to integrate the Negro people into war production and the armed services in order to combat the military forces of fascism abroad; it has also been forced progressively to draw the Negro people into the democratic camp of national unity in order to combat the political forces of fascism here at home.

During the 1940's, as during the 1860's, the struggles of the Negro people for freedom and the struggles of the nation for survival have become inseparably merged. *Both must now move forward together.*

Let those Negroes of faint heart look about them, cast aside their unwarranted discouragement, and enter with full vigor and confidence into the common struggle for the survival of our nation and the liberation of the Negro people. The world is changing—changing progressively before their very eyes.

Let those modern Joshuas who now vainly command the sun of racial equality to cease rising likewise look about them. Their day in history is rapidly passing. Their out-moded edifice of "white supremacy" is crumbling before their very eyes. It will be swept away in the on-rush of mankind toward freedom.

This is a people's war of national liberation and survival—not purely, but *predominantly* and *decisively* so. Moreover, the liberating forces it has unleashed gather momentum every day. Despite the wishes and frantic struggles of reaction, a new society is being forged in the process of our nation's struggle for victory. As that struggle proceeds, the Negro people will continue to move forward toward their historic goal of freedom. This will happen, not merely because it *ought*, but primarily because it *must*. It is an essential requirement of victory for the nation.

THE NEGRO PEOPLE IN THE NATIONAL
FRONT FOR VICTORY

To assert that the progressive nature of this war "requires" the further extension of Negro freedom is not to minimize the importance of continued struggle. The changes now in process are not automatic, nor will they be in the future. The inherent liberating character of the war will not "solve" the problems of the Negro or of the nation as a whole; it but creates highly favorable conditions for the achievement of progressive solutions. Their realization will come only through deliberate and persistent struggle.

Quite the opposite point of view is advanced by important circles in our country. Curiously enough, it is embraced by both the Martin Dies type of reactionary and the John Temple Graves type of Southern liberal. Both find common ground in the proposition that, "for the sake of national unity," there must be a wartime moratorium on agitation for Negro democratic rights.

One of the clearest and most forthright answers to this specious argument is that given by the General Secretary of the Communist party:

There is another field of problems in which national unity demands a much more strict interpretation of equality. Typical...is the problem of our thirteen million Negro citizens. Here it would be disastrously destructive of national unity to try to make our peace with the status quo, which is a status of a shameful heritage from chattel slavery based on Hitler-like racial conceptions; and it would further undermine the United Nations, destroy confidence between the United States on the one side, and our allies and potential allies of the colored races on the other. We dare not, on pain of humiliating defeat in this war, rest complacently on the present status of the Negro citizens of the United States. *We must, as a war necessity, proceed to the systematic and relentless wiping out of every law, custom, and habit of thought, which in flagrant violation of our Constitution enforce an unequal status between Negro and white citizens of the United States.*⁶

⁶ Browder, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91. (Italics not in the original.)

Whoever now attempts to differentiate between the victory-goal of the nation and the freedom-goal of the Negro, setting one against the other, either fails to grasp or deliberately ignores the fundamental unity of the two. The nation's struggles toward victory now necessarily advance the cause of Negro freedom, and the Negro's struggles toward freedom likewise advance the cause of victory for the nation as a whole.

This wartime mutuality between the wartime interests of the Negro people and the rest of the nation serves to emphasize the necessity for ever more vigorous struggles for Negro democratic rights. It does more. It also suggests the direction and form which such struggles must assume if maximum results are to be achieved.

There are some Negro leaders who now propose to "bargain" with their embattled country, offering Negro support of the war "in return for" the correction of existing injustices. Their approach is fundamentally unsound in principle and stupid as a tactic of minority group struggle.

This is not a war which the Negro *may* support—if; rather, it is a war which the Negro *must* support—regardless. The lives and property of the Negro people, too, are at stake in this war. Moreover, all the social gains the Negro has made since slavery, and all he may hope to achieve in the future, are utterly dependent upon victory over the Axis forces of fascist enslavement. Nothing could more surely alienate the Negro people from the very progressive forces whom they must win as allies, nothing could more surely defeat their present and future goals of freedom, than for the Negro now to stand aloof from the developing national front for victory—petulant, impotent, and absurd. The Negro's support of this war is, and must be, unconditional. On no other basis can he now find solution for his problems.

There are also Negro leaders whose main stock in trade now is to denounce "the Government" and "white people" for still existing racial injustices, and to organize mass struggles of the Negro people, *as Negroes*, against both. They too are following a path which weakens the victory program of the nation and leads to the ultimate defeat of their adherents.

In the first place, the Roosevelt Administration has given convincing evidence of its sincere desire to advance the cause of

Negro freedom. Indeed, it has fought hard and achieved substantial results toward this end. For the Negro people now to join forces with the poll-tax Democrats and the reactionary Republicans in further undermining the strength of the progressive Roosevelt Administration would serve the interests neither of victory nor of Negro freedom. It would effectively retard the achievement of both. Again to quote Earl Browder:

There is a loud-mouthed cult in our country which is willing to admit every weakness and error so long as they can blame it on the President. These are the demagogues of reaction. But there are too many honest democrats, progressives, and even labor men, who weaken the President's position by leaving all problems for him to settle, by failing to take energetic action themselves to help solve these problems. . . . No one has any right to criticize the President who is not himself in the midst of the hottest and most uncompromising fight to halt the mob of reaction now controlling the majority of Congress and threatening the whole country and its war effort.⁷

* * *

Second, although there is some justification for "all-Negro" liberation movements, the crying need of this period is for ever-broader unity between progressive white and Negro Americans to promote their common and mutual ends of victory and a democratic peace. Such Negro-white unity is not only more possible because of conditions created by the war; it is also more necessary.

Just as our nation would be in mortal peril if separated from her British, Soviet and Chinese allies, so would the Negro people face certain defeat if they allowed themselves to become separated from and placed in opposition to the other democratic forces of our country. Moreover, the strength of the whole progressive camp would thereby be weakened, and the goals for which this war is being fought would be placed in jeopardy.

The Negro freedom movement derives its main wartime strength from its integral relations with the victory program of the country as a whole. It necessarily follows, therefore, that

⁷ *Policy for Victory* (New York, 1943), p. 66.

conscious struggles for Negro freedom during this period will achieve maximum results to the extent that they are carried on within the framework of the nation's struggle for victory. This premise is fundamental. From it there flow several practical implications for the wartime movement to extend the freedom of the Negro people.

First, organized struggles for Negro freedom must declare their unconditional support of the war effort of our nation. They must declare their full support of the win-the-war policies of our Commander-in-Chief. There must never be the slightest doubt about their genuinely patriotic character.

Second, demands for the correction of specific injustices must be raised as essential war measures to promote victory. Thus, racial bars to employment, abridgments of civil rights, denials of the franchise, discrimination in the armed forces, and the whole array of obstacles to Negro freedom should be challenged as obstacles to victory—which, in very truth, they are. Their removal should be demanded, not solely on the grounds of democratic justice, but especially also on the broader and even more urgent grounds of national security.

Third, organized movements for Negro freedom must direct their attention not only to specific issues of "Negro rights," but also to those larger wartime issues of the nation which profoundly affect the solution of the Negro's problems. They should fight implacably against the defeatist foes of our war effort. They should give aggressive support to such essential win-the-war measures as price and rent control, subsidies, a realistic tax program, an honest and democratic soldier vote bill, poll tax repeal, and the fullest use of war manpower. They should combat all defeatist efforts to disrupt the unity of our nation and of the United Nations. They should struggle to strengthen the program of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition—for the quickest possible defeat and thorough destruction of fascism, for the organization of a just and enduring peace. Especially should they rally to the support of President Roosevelt and the election of a win-the-war Congress in the 1944 elections. In short, they must throw their full resources into the fight for all measures essential for winning the war in the shortest possible time. In the triumph

of the cause of victory will the cause of Negro freedom achieve maximum realization of its goals.

Fourth, the Negro freedom movement must forge the closest possible unity among the Negro people themselves, and between the Negro people and their natural allies in the progressive white population and the organized labor movement. Petty organizational rivalries and factionalism should now be put aside. There should be uncompromising opposition to all reactionary attempts to use the "menace of communism" bogey as a tactic to divide, and thus defeat, the progressive organizations of the people. The growing virus of anti-Semitism must be fought. Above all, the Negro people must enter the labor movement in ever increasing hundreds of thousands, joining actively with their white fellow-workers in the solution of their common trade union problems, and turning the power of their unions increasingly to the related tasks of victory and Negro freedom.

Unequivocal support of this people's war of national liberation and survival. Demands for Negro liberation as a means of winning the war. Vigorous support of the win-the-war policies of our Commander-in-Chief. Solid unity of the Negro people with all other progressive, win-the-war forces of the nation. These are the basic essentials of a wartime program for the Negro people. Herein lie the correct strategy and tactics which will best advance the cause of Negro freedom. It is as an integral and struggling sector of the developing national front for victory that the Negro people can now make their most substantial progress toward attainment of "What the Negro Wants."

POST-WAR PROSPECTS FOR THE NEGRO AND THE NATION

And once the war is won, what then of Negro freedom? Will not the Negro's wartime gains very shortly disappear? What, if any, basis is there for the prospect of continued progress toward freedom in the post-war world? The essential answers to these questions are largely implied in the preceding discussion. It is well to make them explicit.

There are those who see nothing durable in the wartime ex-

tensions of freedom for the Negro people. They believe these gains will vanish once the emergency from which they arose has passed. To them, these advances "must" be transitory because they were yielded under duress; they did not arise out of the chastened hearts of men. There are several considerations which suggest that this pessimism is quite unwarranted.

In the *first* place, the fact that wartime extensions of Negro freedom arise out of historic necessity, far from suggesting their weakness, is in reality their greatest strength. The history of human progress is a record of social gains which were impelled by the inherent logic of events and the struggles of mankind for freedom. "Humanitarianism" and "good will," noble sentiments that they are, have proved to be among the most unstable forces of history. They readily accommodate themselves to the necessities of time and place. It is well for Negro Americans to recall that the Emancipation Proclamation was not dedicated by noble sentiments, but rather by the stern requirements of military necessity.

Second, the events of this period are forging new relationships between the Negro people and the rest of the nation, relationships which, in themselves, are a substantial guarantee of permanence for the wartime extensions of Negro freedom. By way of illustration, consider the position of the new hundreds of thousands of Negro industrial workers, especially in comparison with the last war. After World War I, many—by no means all—Negro workers were ousted from their new-found jobs in the industries of the North. Not only were they members of a subordinate minority race, but they were also recent migrants to their communities, and many had been brought in as "scabs" and "strike-breakers." In the increased post-war competition for jobs, they found themselves in direct conflict with organized white workers into whose unions they had made but little headway. They were replaced.

After World War II, an entirely different situation will obtain. The pre-war influx of Negro workers into the trade union movement will have been enormously increased, especially in the great democratic unions of the CIO in basic industries. In the course of common wartime struggles on the industrial and polit-

ical fronts, hundreds of thousands of Negro workers will have established firm relations of comradeship with their white fellow-workers. Their unions will have come more and more to take up the struggle for economic security and full democratic rights for the Negro people. Their jobs will be far more secure.

As in the industrial world, so in many other areas of our national life, the wartime experiences of the Negro people are fundamentally altering their relationship with their countrymen. New and different social structures are being built, and in their wake different attitudes emerge. In the development of these new wartime relationships, there lies a substantial basis for confidence that the wartime gains of the Negro people will abide.

Third, the future of the Negro's freedom in America will be decisively influenced by the quality of the peace which issues from this war, and here the prospect is far from discouraging. World War II cannot end in another Versailles, precisely because of the nature of the forces in combat, the inherent liberating character which the war has been forced to assume, and the power of the masses of freedom-loving peoples which it has set into motion the world over.

Contrast the anti-Soviet Pact of Munich, which unleashed the fascist military might upon the world, with the Anglo-Soviet-American Declaration of Teheran, which opens up an entirely new perspective for mankind. The capitalist and socialist worlds, once in serious conflict, are now firmly united in "complete agreement," on measures for the military destruction of fascism and the establishment of a just and enduring "peace which will command good will from the overwhelming masses of the peoples of the world." Precisely those three nations which represent the greatest concentrations of military, economic, and political power in the world have now agreed to "work together in the war and in the peace which will follow."

They reached this agreement because of historic necessity—the necessity to collaborate in order to survive. They have the determination and the strength to carry it out. And they *will* carry it out, for there is no other way to victory, and to peace "for many generations."

In a world bathed in blood by the reactionary policies of

Munich, this historic Declaration of Teheran represents an enormous achievement. It opens up the perspective of enduring peace and prosperity for all peoples. It inspires new hope and confidence in all progressive mankind. It lays the basis for the building of a truly progressive peace. It is, by far, the greatest possible guarantee of that kind of post-war world in which the Negro people can continue their march toward complete freedom.

Finally, a word should be said about the tremendous concern in certain quarters over "post-war plans" for the Negro's freedom. The position of the Negro people in the post-war world will not be determined by the blue-prints now formed in the heads of "planners." Rather, it will be determined by the relative strength of the pro-Teheran forces of progress and the anti-Teheran forces of reaction which now struggle for dominance in the world and in our nation. Especially will it be determined by the relations of the Negro people to these forces. Now to draft idealistic post-war plans for the Negro is not necessarily a harmful pastime—except that it tends to divert much needed energy from the really urgent task of today: to win the war at the earliest possible moment. It would be naïve to assume, however, that such "plans" will constitute an important factor in shaping the future of the Negro people.

The Negro's future is being decisively shaped by the struggles for victory and freedom today. Let the Negro people now exert their maximum strength toward winning the war. Let them fight for their own freedom within the framework of the nation's fight for survival. Let them do all in their power to hasten the unconditional surrender of the Axis and the complete destruction of fascism. Let them establish the firmest possible unity with the developing coalition of all other progressive win-the-war forces of our nation—fighting for the triumph of the Roosevelt Administration in the 1944 elections, for that speedy victory in war and that just and enduring peace which are the promise of Teheran.

Let the Negro people do these things *now*. This is their best possible guarantee of freedom in the post-war world. Along this path alone lies the ultimate attainment of "What the Negro Wants."