

Toward Freedom

THE enactment of a truly democratic National Service Act could wipe out, at one fell swoop, a whole host of employment discriminations against Negro workers. This is not an inevitable result, but it is distinctly possible.

President Roosevelt's call for a National Service Act one year ago brought widespread opposition from Negro groups. They feared that the drafting of civilian workers might "freeze" Negroes on the lower rungs of the occupational ladder, that it might prevent their upgrading and entrance into new fields of economic opportunity. And at that time it would have been very difficult to pass national service legislation which would have prevented such an outcome.

But this anxiety is far less valid today. When the President repeats now his call for legislation "for the total mobilization of all our human resources for the prosecution of the war," he does so in a political climate which has changed considerably.

FIRST, Congress has been greatly improved in composition. True, a dangerous gang of reactionaries still remains, but many of their worst colleagues were retired to private



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life by the votes of their constituencies during November. This 79th Congress has very real possibilities of developing a strong coalition of win-the-war progressives which can push forward rapidly toward victory and the democratic goals for which we fight.

Second, the progressive forces outside of Congress are far more mature, far better organized, and far more influential than was true a year ago. Precisely the democratic forces which triumphed over reaction in the recent elections have the power to give effective support to a program of congressional legislation which is consistent with our goals of victory, enduring peace, freedom and security.

Third, the Negro people are now an integral and necessary part of the democratic camp of national unity. As is increasingly demonstrated on many political domestic fronts, their special problems are coming to be taken up and carried forward toward solution by the entire broad coalition of progressive forces centered around President Roosevelt. We may confidently look forward to further development along this line, for the wartime and peacetime necessities of the nation require it.

THUS, it is quite possible now to pass national service legislation which will truly

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safeguard the interests of workers in general, and of Negro workers in particular. In addition to hastening the defeat of our fascist enemies on the battlefields, such legislation would also hasten the defeat of the anti-Negro employers and the few remaining anti-Negro unionists who still allow jimcrow policies to thwart the wartime interests of the nation.

Let labor, industry, Negro groups and government get together and draw up a National Service Act which protects the welfare of workers generally. Let such an act incorporate specifically the principles of FEPC. Let such an act be administered democratically in keeping with those principles, safeguards being provided to assure that all available workers are drafted into whatever jobs the war needs of the nation create, without discrimination on grounds of race, creed, color or national origin. Let these things be done, and the still remaining jimcrow barriers against Negro workers will fall at an even more rapid rate than has been true during the recent past.

It should be emphasized that this is not a necessary and automatic result of national service legislation. It will have to be fought for—first, in the drafting of the law; second, in getting it through Congress, and third, in guaranteeing its democratic administration. But it is a goal now entirely possible to attain, one for which we can fight with confidence of victory.