

W. E. B. DU BOIS

In Battle for Peace

By DOXEY A. WILKERSON



FIFTY-NINE years ago the young William Edward Burghardt Du Bois vowed on his 25th birthday:

"... be the Truth what it may I shall seek it . . . — and Heaven nor Hell, God nor Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die. . . ."

His persistence in this quest in a society whose rulers must try to suppress the truth had a lot to do with the troubles of the older Du Bois on his 83rd birthday. It also does much to explain the development of this remarkable man toward a rare synthesis of theoretical insight and practical leadership in the crucial political struggles of our day—a continuing development which is fully reflected in the analyses of his latest book, *In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday*.*

This book is considerably more than its sub-title suggests; for in re-

counting the dramatic events centering around himself and his colleagues in the Peace Information Center during most of 1951, Dr. Du Bois also interprets much of his earlier life—and, indeed, of this whole turbulent era of social transformation to which he continues to make such outstanding progressive contributions.

In Battle for Peace is, first of all, the moving story of how the struggles of masses of peoples throughout the world beat down the cynical attempt of our war-bound governments to imprison Dr. Du Bois and his associates on the trumped-up charge that their activities for peace were dictated by a "foreign principal." It is also an autobiographical overview of the social forces which long ago pulled a brilliant young Negro scholar out of his academic "Ivory Tower" and thrust him into the practical freedom struggles of his oppressed people, and which later catapulted him into the vortex of the supreme political struggle of our time, as a vital and leading world spokesman for peace. It is, moreover, a profoundly perceptive

* *In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday*, by W. E. B. Du Bois, with comment by Shirley Graham. *Masses & Mainstream*. Popular Edition, \$1.00, Cloth Edition, \$2.50.

live critique of our decadent imperialist society, a fervent plea for "all loyal Americans to preach peace," and a reasoned prophecy of the socialist future of mankind—which "is coming as sure as the rolling of the stars."

The whole of *In Battle for Peace* is enriched by the masterful prose, wit and scathing satire for which Du Bois has long been noted, and especially by the postscript "Comment" with which Shirley Graham concludes several of the chapters. These latter recount moving human sidelights of the dramatic political battle which he and her husband entered on the eve of their marriage, along with intimate glimpses into the consolidation of their union in the midst of the struggle—insights which the apparently (but really not) austere Dr. Du Bois could never, himself, record.

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THE fourteen brief chapters of this 192-page book seem to fall into three groupings. The first six are largely autobiographical, recalling earlier birthday celebrations — with which Du Bois "came to be gradually rather fed up"; his assumption of the Vice Presidency of the Council on African Affairs upon his dismissal for political reasons from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and his somewhat reluctant agreement to the launching under eminent auspices of plans for an 83rd Birthday Dinner; his life-long "Habit of Travel"—four-

teen trips abroad, one around the world—which broadened his political horizon and deepened his interest in the struggle for peace; and his long association with the peace movement in our country, even before World War I, and especially through a series of national and international "Peace Congresses" since 1945.

Here also are accounts of the organization of the Peace Information Center in the spring of 1950, and its collection of more than 2,500,000 signatures to the Stockholm Appeal ("The reputation of Dean Acheson, United States Secretary of State, will never recover from his deliberate attempt to misrepresent the origin, intent and word of this great appeal."); and of Du Bois' notable campaign for election to the United States Senate, entered upon as a means of speaking out for peace and of furthering the re-election of Vito Marcantonio, who "has acted with courage, intelligence and steadfast integrity in the face of ridicule, mud-slinging and cheating."

The next four chapters tell the exciting story of the organized, worldwide campaign to defeat the frame-up "foreign agent" indictment of the leaders of the Peace Information Center — Dr. Du Bois, Mrs. Elizabeth Moos, Abbott Simon, Kyrle Elkin and Miss Sylvia Soloff. Here are vividly related accounts of "The Indictment"—four months after the P.I.C. had been dissolved, in the midst of wedding preparations by Dr. Du Bois and Shirley Graham, and on the eve of the scheduled testimonial dinner

sponsored by several hundred leaders in all walks of life; and of "The Birthday Dinner" — which the Essex House's last-minute cancellation of the Dinner Committee's contract and the frightened withdrawal of three main speakers threatened to wreck.

This occasion was transformed into a genuine people's victory by the steadfast leadership of Dinner Chairman E. Franklin Frazier and his associates, by hasty rearrangement of the program and transfer of the affair to Small's Paradise in Harlem, and especially by "the awakening of Harlem's pride which swamped the Dinner Committee with more paid reservations than could possibly be accommodated"—all of which was immediately followed by the public wedding ceremony and reception, and a relaxing honeymoon trip to Nassau.

Here are the poignant experiences of an eminent and venerable scholar and civic leader whom the Department of Justice sought to picture as "An Indicted Criminal"—the fingerprinting, search for concealed weapons and handcuffing of Du Bois at the arraignment in Washington, the deliberately fostered cloud of suspicion of treasonous behavior, the shying away of many long-time friends and associates, the "silence or violent condemnation" of the commercial press—but also the rallying to the defense by the Negro masses and the Negro press, by progressive trade unions and other groups in our country, and especially by peace and other people's organizations throughout the world ("... it is no exaggeration to say

that their interest and indignation kept me out of prison").

Here also is the story of the central defense agency — the National Committee to Defend Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Associates in the Peace Information Center—its extensive organizing, letter-writing and public campaign, and two "Pilgrimages of Defense" which carried Dr. and M. Du Bois on vigorous speaking tours across the country—with the result that "at last we got our case before the world . . . [and] a stream of contributions to meet our expenses came from all over the country, in small sums, but an aggregate which amounted to over \$35,000. Justice was not free in the United States."

THE climax of the book comes in the last group of chapters, which center around the trial and acquittal of Dr. Du Bois and his associates. Here is the sordid story—"Oh! Joe Rogge"—of how a one-time "liberal" who early defined his life ambition as "to make money," personally invited Dr. Du Bois to his home to help organize the Peace Information Center and later turned up to testify falsely (and most ineffectually) as the chief government witness at the trial ("And so, in my mind—I try not unjustly—to Wallace the Weasel I now add, Rogge the Rat"). This is followed by a precise analysis of the narrow legal issue and the broader political issues involved in the trial, a review of the day-to-day proceedings in the courtroom, and a dramatic account of "The Acquittal"—which

ame suddenly, even before the defense was called upon to present its case.

Here also is a series of caustic comments on "this extraordinary trial . . . in which the government} was unable with all its power and money to convince one of its own judges that it had sufficient evidence to lay before a jury"; on the enormous costs of justice in the courts of our land ("What turns me cold in all this experience is the certainty that thousands of innocent victims are in jail today because they had neither money nor friends to help them. . . . God only knows how many who were as innocent as I and my colleagues are today in hell."); and on the contrast between most Negro business and professional leaders, who remained silent while Du Bois fought for his freedom and for peace, and the militant support he received from the Negro masses — which "began slowly as soon as they could understand the facts, and then swelled in astonishing volume as the trial neared."

The concluding Chapter, "Interpretations," opens with this paradox:

"Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called Communists. Is this shame for the Peacemakers or praise for the Communists? Accursed are the Communists, for they claim to be Peacemakers. Is this shame for the Communists or praise for the Peacemakers?"

There follows a trenchant analysis of the basic material forces which underlie the war drive of U.S. imperialism and its efforts to suppress the peace movement, the Negro libera-

tion movement and all independent political thought and action behind a spurious cloak of "anti-communist" hysteria. There is also a forthright declaration of the author's own position as regards the main contending forces of our time—firmly within the world camp of peace, democracy and socialism.

Here is probably the most rounded statement to appear in recent years of the world outlook of W. E. B. Du Bois, and of his view of the relation which the Negro question bears to the broader political issues of our age. The whole is done with deep historical insight—and with much of that superb prose-poetry for which Du Bois is justly famed, as in this striking paragraph toward the end of the chapter:

"For many years now I have viewed in long procession the pale dreams of men wandering vaguely yet rhythmically down the years. Yet never in any single year has the frustration and paradox of life stood out so clearly as in this year when, having finished 83 years of my life in decency and honor, with something done and something planned, I stepped into the 84th year with handcuffs on my wrists. Like the utter rending of precious fabric I was witnessing the blood-stained collapse of Atlantic culture finding burial on the ancient ruins of the Mediterranean efforts to civilize mankind. I saw this caricature and contradiction of mighty ideals, in frantic dying struggle, trying with lewd incest again to rape the All-Mother Asia from northern Heartland to southern sea, from Russia to India. And when weak and isolated by race I tried to make faint protest against this world suicide, I was slandered and shamed and threatened with five years in prison and \$10,000 fine."

An eleven page "Appendix" includes the text of Dr. Du Bois' address at the All-Russian Peace Congress in Moscow in 1949, illustrative 83rd Birthday Greetings from countries throughout the world, a brief note on the acclaim with which the acquittal was greeted in most quarters, and an ironic little postscript by Shirley Graham—telling of the receipt on the morning of their wedding anniversary of a State Department notice that the passports of Dr. and Mrs. Du Bois had been withdrawn.

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IN BATTLE FOR PEACE not only documents and interprets the Peace Information Center Case of 1951; it also throws considerable light on the background and development of its distinguished author.

In an earlier autobiographical piece Dr. Du Bois records how he went to Atlanta University in 1897 to pioneer in developing a systematic, rounded, 100-year program of studies of Negro life, operating on "the firm belief that race prejudice was based on widespread ignorance," for which his "long-term remedy was Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determines the limits of a man's capacity or desert."

But the serene perspective he then held was soon shattered by the murderous mass violence directed against the Negro people with the maturing of U.S. imperialism around the turn of the century; and in 1910 he left

the relative calm of academic life and plunged into the urgent practical struggles "Along the Color Line" as a founder and leader of N.A.A.C.P. and the fighting editor of its magazine *Crisis*.

"I faced situations which called shrieked—for action, even before any tailed, scientific study could possibly prepared. . . . I saw before me a problem that could not await the last word of science, but demanded immediate action to prevent social death."

Du Bois was coming gradually to understand that "there could be no rift between theory and practice; that 'the social scientist could not sit apart and study *in vacuo*'; and that even 'the ordered knowledge which research and tireless observation might give' must be sought 'in the midst of action.'"

Would that many more students of our society could grasp this fundamental insight!

In his most recent book, Du Bois tells how he also came to discard the idealist misconception of the reason for Jim Crow oppression. In the course of the struggles against lynching and for civil rights during the 1920's, he writes, "I began to lean toward the Marxian view of politics as at bottom economics, and said so in the resolutions which for years I wrote for annual meetings of the N.A.A.C.P."

"Slowly I came to recognize that

* W. E. B. Du Bois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom," *What the Negro Wants*, edited by Rayford Logan, 1944.

cause of . . . [the Negro's] suffering was not primarily a matter of ethics, but of ease of exploitation; of the larger profit which could be had from low-paid Negro labor. . . ."

Previously he had written: "I believe in the dictum of Karl Marx, that the economic foundation of a nation is widely decisive for its politics, its art and its culture."**

The early Du Bois was preoccupied with the special problems of the Negro race, in the Americas and in Africa (he organized and led several meetings of the Pan-African Congress during the years immediately following World War I); but the very struggles in which he engaged led toward an understanding of the organic link between the special oppression of the Negro peoples and the exploitation of the working class on a world scale. This understanding was accentuated when the C.I.O. movement of the 1930's began to organize masses of Negro workers into the unions. Then, he tells us: "I began slowly to emerge from my provincial racialism and to envisage the broader problems of work and income as affecting all men regardless of color or nationality."

The Du Bois of the Niagara Movement and the nascent N.A.A.C.P. believed that the liberation of his people would come through "social guidance" and "uplift" of the Negro masses by a small, college-trained Negro intelligentsia.

"I insisted, therefore, on the education of a Talented Tenth, assuming naively that these trained members of the learned professions would supply leadership for the working classes."

But much of this "Talented Tenth" assumed the political role characteristic of any other petty bourgeoisie: ". . . a large and powerful portion of the educated and well-to-do Negroes are refusing to forge forward in social leadership of anyone, even their own people." As a result of many experiences—not the least being those associated with his 83rd birthday—the Du Bois of today has come to understand that the effective progressive leadership of the working class Negro masses must come *mainly* from their own ranks, from Negroes "trained as workers and not as exploiting aristocrats."

HE HAS also come to see the importance of Negro-white and international working class unity—another insight strengthened by the struggles around the Peace Information Center: "Without the help of the trade unionists, white and black, without the Progressives and radicals, without Socialists and Communists and lovers of peace all over the world, my voice would now be stilled forever."

Dr. Du Bois recalls in *In Battle for Peace* that his first trip to the Soviet Union, in 1928, "was for me a never-to-be-forgotten experience, and it strengthened my basic belief in Socialism as the one great road to prog-

** *Ibid.*, p. 61.

ress." Subsequently he has come even more "to respect and admire" the U.S.S.R.

"I regard that land as today the most hopeful nation on earth, not because of its theory, but because of what it has accomplished. It has in a generation raised hundreds of millions of debased serfs out of illiteracy, superstition and poverty to self-respecting, hard-working manhood."

Especially is he impressed with the Soviet Union's system of popular education: "There is in the world no system equal to it. If American Negroes had half the chance of the Russians to learn to read, write and count, there would be no Negro question today. No nation which plans tyranny establishes such public education."

The basic contradiction inherent in capitalist society — which generates impoverishment, national oppression, fascism and war, and also the revolutionary struggles of the working class — is clearly formulated in this volume:

"Our present economic problem stems from the fact that while production is increasingly a social process, the distribution of its results still remains largely a matter of the individual judgment of persons who happen to have the power or who seize the power to decide, and on the basis of concepts of property and income which no longer correspond to fact."

Likewise spelled out is the necessity, the historic trend toward and the inevitability of "social control of production and distribution of wealth" on a world scale: "You cannot stop this line of thought from growing in an intelligent world if

you kill all the youth and dye the oceans red with blood." Thus, Du Bois understands the fundamental nature of the conflict between the rising forces of world socialism and the declining forces of moribund capitalism—and hence what lies behind the current threat of war.

Moreover, on the basis of this understanding, Du Bois also sees the futility and horrible consequences of another world war. He rejects the view that war is inevitable; urges abandonment of the "Truman Doctrine . . . which is bound to lead to disaster"; and calls for a foreign policy predicated upon the peaceful co-existence of the capitalist and socialist worlds: "I am convinced today that both systems can live together without war and with helpful competition. Stalin has said so, but Truman has not."

As regards these and many other fundamental understandings, *In Battle for Peace* reflects the gradual and continuing development of the world view and political program of W. E. B. Du Bois. It also reflects his impatience with mere "understanding." Du Bois *acts*—marshalling his great talents and strength for effective leadership in an ever-broadening political arena; and out of such practical struggles come deeper theoretical insights, leading to still more effective action.

IT IS this continuing unity of theory and practice—expressed through life-long involvement in the Negro liberation movement, with its funda-

mental and inherent antithesis of imperialism and its strong and manifold international ties—which constitutes in my opinion the key explanation of why the idealist young scholar who began his work at Atlanta University 5 years ago emerges now as a recognized leader and spokesman of the people's forces for peace, democracy and socialism on a world scale.

A dominant note running throughout this fighting book—as through the life of its fighting author—is the bold and confident challenge of the forces of political reaction. Du Bois has always been incorrigibly honest and frank—even to the point of alienating many persons who might otherwise have been his friends; and he still disdains to pull his punches and play it “safe.”

At the very time he learned that the Department of Justice was trying to brand him as a “foreign agent” he accepted the American Labor Party's nomination for U.S. Senator in order more effectively to carry forward his struggle for peace. Some time after the formal indictment, when rising mass protests were beginning to jolt the State and Justice Departments out of their white chauvinist underestimation of Du Bois, he flatly rejected a proffered “deal” which would have ended the case without establishing his innocence. In the very midst of the trial he went to Boston to speak out against the war policy of our government and to call for a new crusade for peace and freedom: “What we have done, we can do again. But not by silence—

not by refusing to face the ugly facts.”

No wonder the trusts which dominate our government wanted to put this man in prison!

No wonder the democratic and peace forces throughout the world rallied in triumphant struggle to defend his freedom!

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THE analyses of *In Battle for Peace* are not without some limitations; but these by no means impair the great value of the book as a weapon in the struggle for democracy and peace.

There are a number of conceptions and formulations in this book with which I, as a Marxist, would disagree. For example, Du Bois tends to label practically every form of public ownership or control of economic activity as “socialism”—from the New Deal planning of Roosevelt to the conduct and regulation of transportation, industry and foreign trade by ours and other capitalist-dominated governments. He thereby tends to negate the crucial fact that there can be no real collective ownership and operation of the means of production in the interest of the whole people without working class control of the state.

One also finds here occasional tendencies toward almost mystical conceptions about the Negro race. Illustrative is Du Bois' account of his earlier effort—which he still says “was once possible”—to check class differentiation among Negroes through fostering an “inner Negro cultural ideal . . . built on ancient African

communism, supported and developed by memory of slavery and experience of caste, which would drive the Negro group into a spiritual unity precluding the development of economic classes and inner class struggle." Such philosophical idealism seems incongruous in the writings of a great scholar who predicates most of his analyses on the scientific, materialist conception of reality.

Along with a correct appraisal of the necessary leading role of the working class Negro masses in the fight for Negro freedom, there is also evident in this book a tendency to "write off" most of the Negro petty bourgeoisie as incurably self-seeking and reactionary. Du Bois is careful to note exceptions in the case of "that smaller part of the Negro intelligentsia which has shared my vision"; but it is clear that he expects very little that is progressive from "a large and powerful portion of the educated and well-to-do Negroes."

This attitude is understandable in the light of the prevailing accommodation of most of the Negro business and professional class to the over-all imperialist policies of our government, strikingly manifest in their indifference or frightened silence while Du Bois was fighting to stay out of prison. Nevertheless, it would be a serious political error to minimize the important role of the Negro middle class in the inherently anti-imperialist struggles which are now being directed against Jim Crow oppression, or to underestimate the

still substantial revolutionary potential which this petty bourgeois stratum of the oppressed Negro people can be expected to reveal at a high stage in the development of the class struggle in our country.

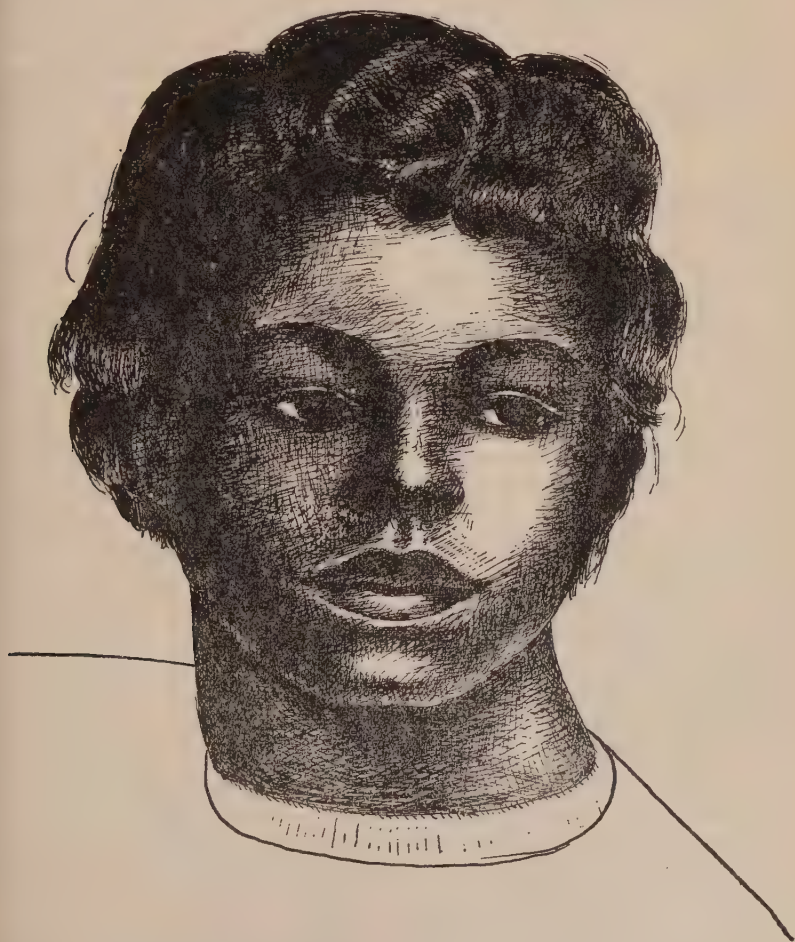
Du Bois, himself—along with Paul Robeson and Benjamin Davis—must be viewed as a precursor of many more leaders of vision and power who will step forward out of the ranks of the Negro middle class once the allied U.S. working class assumes—as it surely will—its independent political role as the leading and decisive force for progress in America. I fear that, having abandoned his once cherished "Talented Tenth," Du Bois now tends toward the opposite extreme.

BUT the importance of this book can never be measured by the extent to which its analyses are in technical accord with all the principles of dialectical and historical materialism. It must be appraised, rather, in terms of its meaning for the life-and-death struggles which now confront the Negro people and the working class of our country.

In Battle for Peace is an extremely valuable weapon in the fight for peace, for Negro freedom, for the right to teach and advocate socialism and for independent political action in the fall elections. *Masses and Mainstream* is to be congratulated for its publication, and especially for their production of the very attractive popular edition at a surprisingly low price.

In this critical year of 1952 the world renowned scholar and recognized "Dean of American Letters," Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, has placed in our hands a resounding challenge to the Big Lie that war is inevitable and that communism is a menace. He has issued here a powerful call

for the fighting unity of all freedom-loving Americans in the struggle for democracy and peace. I urge progressives everywhere to guarantee the wide distribution and use of this fighting book among Negro and white workers and intellectuals throughout our country.



Drawing by Edward Strickland