

Negro Leadership

By **Doxey Wilkerson**

The Negro people are emerging as a decisive factor in the political life of the nation. Whose leadership shall they follow?

As the conflict sharpens between the reactionary defeatist-appeaser forces, on the one hand, and the progressive win-the-war forces, on the other, the struggle for the leadership of the Negro masses becomes crucial. Both within and without the ranks of the Negro people, competition for this leadership grows increasingly intense. And well it might, for whoever leads the Negro people now has an important ally in his cause.



Who shall lead the Negro people? Shall it be the long-war negotiated peace forces, or the short-war unconditional surrender forces of our nation?

It matters little that the basic long-run interests of the Negro people are inseparably bound up with the quick and decisive defeat of the Axis, the complete destruction of fascist governments, and the resultant strengthening of the democratic forces in our own nation and throughout the world. These are intellectual considerations which do not move the masses of Negro people.

The Negro masses respond to the influences which immediately affect the freedom to which they aspire. They see their freedom goals being attained during and because of the war. They tend, therefore to readily accept the false and reactionary doctrine that a long war would promote the cause of Negro freedom. Certain Negro "nationalist" movements, in conscious or unconscious alliance with the defeatist forces of our nation, are deliberately spreading this long-war propaganda among the Negro masses. There is very real danger that they shall lead large sectors of the Negro people into unintentional support of precisely that defeatist program which now represents the greatest threat to the

freedom of the Negro and the nation as a whole.

Who shall lead the Negro people? Shall it be the Republicans or the Democrats?

It is clear to the well informed that the Republican Party has now become the main political vehicle of defeatist reaction, so much so that even a Wendell Willkie apparently has decided to "play ball" with the big boys upon whom his nomination for the presidency depends. It is also clear that the Democratic Party of our Commander-in-Chief, despite its poll tax and defeatist minority, is the main political instrument of the progressive win-the-war forces upon whom victory and a constructive peace primarily depend.

It is clear, further, that party labels, as such, are not decisive, that the political path which our nation must follow during this period of crisis lies in the coalescence of progressive Democrats and Republicans in firm and aggressive support of the win-the-war policies of President Roosevelt.

These things are clear to the well informed. But the masses of Negro people, like the masses of other Americans, are not well informed. They are ready to support whatever candidates and whatever party seems most likely to advance the cause of Negro freedom—now. In several of last week's local and state elections, the Republicans demonstrated greater alertness to this fact than the Democrats—and they got the Negro vote. So might it be when the defeatist rulers of the Republican Party make their supreme bid for control of our government in 1944.

Unless the Democratic Party of President Roosevelt shows greater readiness immediately to broaden the area of Negro freedom in the economic and national life of the nation, it might well lose a significant proportion of its recently acquired Negro votes.

Who shall lead the Negro people? Shall it be the AFL or the CIO—or, indeed, the anti-labor forces of our nation?

William Green can complain all

he wants to about the refusal of outstanding Negro leaders to help the AFL organize Negro workers, but so long as the AF of L continues to hedge on the issue of racial discrimination, as it did at last month's Boston Convention, the AFL shall never lead the masses of Negro people. On the other hand, Phillip Murray and the other leaders of CIO can be assured of increasing leadership over the Negro masses if they carry forward the forthright struggles for Negro freedom which were projected, thoroughly discussed, and unanimously agreed upon at last week's Convention in Philadelphia.

The theoretical fact that the basic wartime and continuing interests of the Negro people are identical with those of labor has little or no practical effect in moving the Negro masses. Only to the extent that organized labor demonstrates its readiness to fight now as an ally in the Negro's struggle for freedom will labor come to influence the masses of Negro people.

To the extent that labor fails to assume this responsibility, to that extent will the leadership of the Negro people pass to other—often anti-labor—forces in the nation.

There is no mystery about what it takes to lead the Negro people. The Negro masses want jobs commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. They want decent houses to live in. They want full civil and political rights. They want fair treatment in the armed forces. And they want these things now! Whoever fights most vigorously and effectively for these things, he shall lead the Negro people.

The coalition of labor and other progressive win-the-war forces behind the victory program of our Commander-in-Chief can easily win leadership of the Negro masses—or they can lose that leadership, through default, to the forces of defeatism and reaction. It is essential that they win. The survival of America as a free nation and the liberating goals for which this war is being fought—these are the stakes involved in the current struggle for leadership of the Negro people.