

the MARCH ON WASHINGTON one year after..

WHEN THIS
PAMPHLET FIRST
APPEARED AS A
MAGAZINE AR-
TICLE, GEORGE
SCHUYLER, THE
NOTED NEGRO
COLUMNIST,
WROTE IN THE
MAY 30 PITTS-
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1942

THE
World
TODAY

By
GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

Best critique of Randolph's
March-on-Washington move-
ment appears in the maga-
zine "Fourth International"
(20 cents), published at 116
University Place, New York.
The caustic comments of the
author, Albert Parker, and
his sound logic should pro-
voke considerable thought in
colored America about the
eminent labor leader and
Spingarn Medalist.

By
ALBERT PARKER

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INTRODUCTION

More than a year ago, when the March-on-Washington movement was first launched, the author and publishers of this pamphlet expressed their whole-hearted support for the objectives of this movement—the achievement of full social, economic and political equality for the Negro people. In a pamphlet published by us in June 1941, "The Negro March On Washington," we urged the Negro people to rally to the support of this new movement and through the March to strike a powerful blow for racial equality.

Now, in New York, Chicago, Washington and many other cities, mass meetings against Jim Crowism are being held and planned under the auspices of the March-on-Washington Committees. Again we say to the Negro masses:

Full support to the struggle for racial equality! Make these meetings the biggest demonstrations against Jim Crowism that the nation has ever witnessed! Build a powerful mass movement, with policies decided by the rank and file and a leadership elected by the rank and file, that will never compromise in the fight against the enemies of the Negro people!

It is in the interests of building such a movement that we publish this pamphlet. Its aim is, by explaining the mistakes of the past, to help the builders of this movement avoid mistakes in the future. If this pamphlet accomplishes that alone, it will fully have justified its publication.

June, 1942

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THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON ONE YEAR AFTER . . .

By **ALBERT PARKER**

Demonstrations are now being held by the Negro March-on-Washington Committee. More power to them!—for they express the fact that the Negro masses are aroused again, ready to fight for their democratic rights. Let us hope that this time the fight will be carried through to the end! If the Negro people are to get anywhere this time, they must understand the lessons of last year's abortive March on Washington movement.

This movement was in existence for only a few months, it failed to achieve the purpose for which it was created, and it disintegrated in a few days. Nevertheless it was the most significant mass movement of Negroes in many years.

It was significant because it showed that in 1941 the Negro masses had lost confidence in the old movements and methods offered for achieving the abolition of racial discrimination in industry, in government jobs and in the armed forces. Hitherto they had followed the leadership of the professional hat-in-handers, who told them that their salvation lay in acting "respectable" and voting for the "right man"—the right man being the capitalist politician who threw the misleaders of the Negro people a few crumbs every now and then.

The masses observed the approach of full United States participation in the war, they saw the war boom of industry all around them, and they were inspired by the successful organization campaigns of the trade union movement in industries where no headway had ever been made before. At the same time they were painfully aware that Negroes were still segregated in the Army, assigned to kitchen duty in the Navy and barred from the Marine Corps; they saw the total number of unemployed workers decreasing while the number of Negro unemployed remained stationary; they knew prices were going up, relief was being cut, and they were still barred from the overwhelming majority of jobs that paid half-way decent wages.

The conditions for a Negro mass movement were thus created. A. Philip Randolph and the others at the head of the March-on-Washington movement were able to assume its leadership only by speaking the language of militancy, by telling the masses that they had the power to improve their conditions if they would organize themselves and exert their mass pressure on Washington. The enthusiastic response of the masses, the swift wave of fighting optimism and the willingness to sacrifice for the struggle that swept the Negro population were evidence that the Randolphs had not created the movement—they were only capitalizing on the already existing sentiments of the masses. When Randolph first wrote about the march in January 1941, he said he thought it might be possible to have 10,000 Negroes marching down Pennsylvania Avenue; in two or three months, despite extremely poor organizational work, Randolph was able to predict 50,000 marchers, and before the march was called off at the end of June, he claimed to speak for 100,000 people preparing to march to Washington.

Another very significant thing about this movement was that it was not administered a direct defeat in action by its open enemies. Two weeks before the date set for the march a barrage was opened by the administration; every kind of attempt was made to have it called off; so-called "friends" of the Negro people such as Mrs. Roosevelt and LaGuardia appealed in the name of patriotism, and threatened that the march would "set back the progress which is being made"; Roosevelt himself took the unprecedented step of issuing a proclamation asking all employers to examine whether or not their employment policies made provision for the utilization of available and competent Negro workers. But none of this had the effect desired. The local march committees meeting that week refused to be taken in and they insistently let the Randolph leadership know that they wanted the march to go through unless they were actually granted what they had demanded.

A week later, Randolph and Co. "persuaded" Roosevelt to issue his Executive Order 8802, and then Randolph bureaucrat-ically called off the march in a radio speech hailing the executive order as a second Emancipation Proclamation. Thus Randolph did what neither administration threats nor promises had been able to do. The movement melted away in short order as its members began to understand how they had been sold

down the river. But the masses did not walk out because they felt defeated, or because they thought that their fight could not be won. They had not lost confidence in themselves or their ability to win the fight against Jim Crow—only in the Randolphs and their policies. When Negro misleaders and government agents deplore and grumble about “poor Negro morale,” they may not know it but they are really talking about the determination of the Negro masses to continue the struggle for equal rights, war or no war.

To see why the Negro ranks want to continue that struggle, despite the unhappy experience of the march and the pressure of the war regime, it is necessary only to examine the terms of Roosevelt’s executive order and to sum up the present state of Negro rights and conditions.

Randolph’s avowed aim for the march was an executive order decreeing the abolition of discrimination in the Army, Navy, Air Corps, Marines and on all war production. Despite his praise for Order 8802, not even Randolph was able to pretend that Roosevelt had granted what the Negro ranks wanted.

In the first place, the order concerned only discrimination by employers in “defense industries.” The order did *not* abolish discrimination in industry. It stated that all contracting agencies of the government would “include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color or national origin.” But what would happen to employers who violated such contracts? Randolph and the Negro press had been demanding that Roosevelt put “some teeth” into the order—that such employers be fined and their contracts withdrawn. Roosevelt’s order included no measures for punishing violators, which could be and was interpreted by the capitalists generally to mean that there would be no crackdown for violations.

Instead of putting teeth into his order, Roosevelt created a Committee on Fair Employment Practices which was to “receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this order” and “to take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid.” But what effective steps could it take when it didn’t have the power to fine employers or revoke contracts? The committee has proved able only to hold local public hearings at which representatives

of employers and workers speak about the situation in particular factories. Such publicity and private discussions with some employers who openly disregarded the no-discrimination provisions have resulted in a few Negroes being employed in plants where none had been employed before. But these are what the president of the New Jersey CIO has aptly described as "token employment." Many employers have hired a half-dozen Negroes and point to them as proof that they do not discriminate. The committee is unable to do anything in these cases but "urge" that the employers comply with the spirit as well as the word of the executive order.

A recent press report demonstrates how weak and ineffective the committee has been. On April 122, more than nine months after the executive order, the committee issued a statement calling on ten industrial concerns "holding millions of dollars in war contracts" in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas to stop discrimination in employment. The companies include a General Motors Buick plant, a Studebaker branch factory, the Stewart-Warner Corporation, Allis-Chalmers and the Heil Company which is owned by the governor of Wisconsin. They are accused of giving orders to private and public employment agencies to submit employment applications of only white and Gentile workers; of advertising in newspapers only for whites, Gentiles and Protestants; and of having refused "to give workers of specified races or creeds opportunities for promotion in keeping with their qualifications." Open violations of this kind indicate in what contempt the monopolies hold the executive order and the president's committee. To finish the picture, it should be stated that this was the first time in its existence that the committee had taken so drastic a step as to name violators; it probably was done only after the committee had pleaded piteously with the employers involved to mend their ways. The only answer of the companies was to deny that they were guilty of discrimination. One company alone promised to change its ways. And there the matter rests. Even more recently, on May 26, the Fair Employment Practices Committee, in publicizing the discriminatory practices followed by eight companies in the New York-New Jersey area working almost exclusively on war contracts, said: "Complaints received by us and other agencies of the New York State and federal governments indicate that there is a

long list of employers who have hitherto refused *and who now refuse* employment to persons because of their race, their religion, or their national background." Need anything be added to this confession of bankruptcy?

It would be incorrect to conclude from this that additional Negro workers have not secured employment since the order was issued. Although there are no official figures on the question, occasional reports in the Negro press would indicate that several thousand Negroes have secured jobs in industry since last June. First, there is the "token employment" referred to above. In the second place, government agencies have been able to secure a few thousand jobs for Negroes from employers who are so busy piling profits into the bank that they are not concerned with what they consider to be secondary matters, or from employers who felt for local reasons that they had nothing to gain from discrimination. In the third place, Negroes have been able to get some jobs in a number of non-war industries as white workers leave, attracted by the generally higher pay and steadier work of the war industries.

More important, there has been a growing recognition inside even that minority of the trade union movement which barred Negroes from membership that a Jim Crow policy helps only the employers; in recent months there have been encouraging reports about AFL unions threatening to strike unless Negroes were hired by the companies with which they held contracts and about AFL local unions voting, despite the discriminating constitutions of their international organizations, to open their books to Negro workers. In the CIO, where the formal bans against racial discrimination have generally been respected, there are inspiring reports of white workers paying more than lip service to the struggle for Negro equality, winning jobs and promotions for their colored brothers despite the discriminating practices of the employers.

Finally, and this is by far the most important factor, a shortage of skilled and even unskilled labor is beginning to make itself felt; and employers who used to pretend that they could not hire Negroes because it would create resentment and "labor difficulties" among their white employees, have not hesitated where they could not get white workers to employ Negroes in the unskilled and lower paid positions. This process has been halted somewhat by the layoffs due to conversion of

plants to war production and the increasing employment of women workers; but undoubtedly within the next year it will be resumed.

Thus most of the jobs the Negro people have received in the last year or will receive in the next are the result of the needs of the war machine, not of a successful struggle to abolish discrimination. This means that when the war is over the Negro worker will again be the first to be fired—except in those cases where he belongs to a strong trade union which is willing and able to protect his seniority rights; and even this will not be very much protection because the Negro is still the last one being hired in the war industries.

While Roosevelt has recognized *on paper* the rights of the Negroes to equal treatment in industry, he has never recognized their right to equal treatment by the government in the armed forces. Here the needs and aspirations of the Negro people run smack into the opposition not of an individual employer or corporation, but the government itself.

By conscription the government has already provided the mechanism for drawing into the military struggle as many Negro soldiers as it will require. The administration does not object to using the Negroes in the armed forces any more than it objects to having the employers use Negroes to turn out the materials of war. And perhaps Roosevelt as an individual might have no objections to granting the Negro people the right to serve in the armed forces on the same basis as anyone else.

But Roosevelt is not in Washington as an individual—he is there as the leader of the Democratic Party, and by the grace of the viciously anti-Negro leaders of the Democratic Party of the South. Oppression of the Negro people is not an exclusive product of the South; the mob violence to prevent Negroes from moving into the Sojourner Truth federal housing project in Detroit on February 28 is proof of that. Nevertheless the oppression of the Negro plays a special role in the South; indeed, this oppression is at the foundation of all the power and profits of the Southern ruling class. The Bourbons know that they remain in power only through the super-exploitation of the Negro; when the “representatives” of the South in Congress rant about what they would do if “radicals” try to organize the Negro and restore their right

to vote, they mean what they say, they would not hesitate to drown in blood any attempt to abolish the Jim Crow system.

These Southern Congressmen wield—through the poll tax and similar devices—a disproportionate influence not only in Congress, but also in the Democratic Party; without their support Roosevelt would not have been elected in 1940. Hence Roosevelt's silence on anti-lynch legislation in the most liberal days of his New Deal. Roosevelt may have his differences on some questions with his Southern colleagues, but he does not dare to offend them or to cross them on what they call the color question.

The Jim Crow elements of the South dislike the use of the Negro in the armed forces; their resentment at seeing a Negro in uniform is at the bottom of most of the violence against Negro troops in the South. But war is war, and the more far-sighted of these elements realize that if Negroes are required to save what Congressman John E. Rankin of Mississippi calls "our way of life and our sacred institutions so that the white man's civilization may not perish from the earth," then Negroes will just have to be used in the armed forces.

But not as equals! The Southern ruling class will not have them get any uppity ideas about "being as good as a white man," as so many Negroes did when they returned from the first "war for democracy." The Southern ruling class lynched the Negroes wearing uniforms on the street after 1918 to teach the Negro people that they had not been fighting for democracy for themselves. It wants to make sure that the Negroes will not have any illusions about this war too; hence in the armed forces they are to be branded as second-class citizens. For, as the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party put it almost two years ago, the Southern Bourbons "fear that no Negro trained to handle a gun would peacefully go back to the old life of discrimination, segregation, disfranchisement and insult, after training in an army where he was treated as an equal with white soldiers."

So Roosevelt, despite the pleas of Randolph and Co., made no concessions in this field when he wrote his executive order last year; in fact, he did not even mention the armed forces in the order. It was not until April 5 of this year that he had anything to say about it. In a letter to the Fraternal Council of

Negro Churches on that date, he summed up the administration's policy as follows:

"At my direction, the armed services have taken numerous steps to open opportunities for Negroes in the armed forces of our country, and they are giving active consideration to other plans which will increase that participation."

In other words, there are more Negroes in the armed forces than there were a year ago, and they have been given the opportunity to serve in a few more branches of the service. *But segregation continues untouched!* Negroes must still serve in separate regiments. These separate regiments are now being gathered together into divisions—as separate all-Negro division (all-Negro, that is, except for white officers). Negroes must still eat separately, sleep separately, march separately, pray separately, watch a movie separately, in this army ostensibly warring for democracy.

Segregation of this kind violates the most elementary principles of equality and democracy and is a token of the treatment the Negro will get after the war. In addition, it lays the basis for the kind of discrimination that often makes the difference between life and death. It is much easier for Jim Crow elements in the General Staff to pick part of a Negro regiment as a "suicide squad" than it would be to pick the same number of individual Negro soldiers out of mixed regiments for the same job. This happened in the last war, and it happened in France in this war when the lives of thousands of Negro colonial soldiers were thrown away simply because they were considered "inferior" and could easily be assigned to the suicide work because they were in segregated regiments.

Roosevelt talks about the opportunities being opened—but the chief opportunity the Negro sees is to be killed or beaten by Jim Crow elements in the Army and out of it, long before he is even sent overseas. No amount of honeyed words can make Negroes forget how they are humiliated by the Southern police and mobs; how Ned Turman was shot to death in Fort Bragg last summer because he protested against M.P. brutality and resisted it with the cry, "I'm going to break up you M.P.'s beating us colored soldiers!"; how scores of Negro troops were shot and beaten by M.P.'s and state troopers in Alexandria, La., last January, because some of them objected to M.P. brutality; how in March and April 1942 alone, five Negro

soldiers were shot dead in New Jersey, Arkansas, Texas, and Virginia, and countless Negro soldiers attacked in these and other states.

Symbolic, too, of the opportunities offered the Negro soldiers is their first overseas assignment—Australia, where Negro immigration is forbidden by law and where the natives who inhabited the country before the whites came are segregated on reserves or on islands off the continent. And even there, where the very existence of Australian “democracy” is in danger, the United States Negro troops have been sent not as fighters, but as labor battalions.

The “other plans” which Roosevelt referred to on April 5 were the new regulations for Negro service in the Navy announced by Secretary Knox on April 7. These regulations were finally put into effect because of the national wave of protest against Navy segregation of Negroes that arose when the country learned the story of Dorie Miller, a Negro mess attendant on the U.S.S. Arizona at Pearl Harbor.

Miller, like all other Negroes in the Navy, was down in the kitchen when the war began. Twenty years ago, after the first “war for democracy” had been won, the Navy decreed that Negroes would hereafter be accepted only as flunkies. Negroes had kept winning promotions and becoming officers and the Navy found it difficult to give them assignments “where the rated Negroes exercised little or no military command.”

Protests against this ruling had little effect. Fifteen sailors on the U.S.S. Philadelphia, stationed at Pearl Harbor in the winter of 1940-41, had been discharged from the Navy for writing a letter to a Negro newspaper protesting against their Jim Crow conditions.

But when the bombs began to fall around the ship, Miller came to the deck, seized a machine gun and manned it until it ran out of ammunition, despite the fact that because of his color he had never been taught how to handle such guns; then, as the ship was sinking, he helped rescue a wounded officer. The cry that went up everywhere against the Jim Crow regulations succeeded in getting some action out of Roosevelt’s Knox—action which was intended to silence the criticism and yet at the same time continue to deny the Negro sailors the right to serve on the basis of equality with whites.

This writer pointed out a year ago: “Negroes long clam-

ored for admission into the Air Corps; finally they got—a segregated all-Negro squadron. Negro doctors asked for admission into the Army; they were admitted—but limited to attend to Negro troops. Other branches of the service, such as the Marines and Coast Guard, are still closed to the Negro. If the government should open them, it would be on the same Jim Crow basis as the others.” Knox’s April 7 order bore out this prediction—what he set up was a separate, Jim Crow section of the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard.

According to this plan, Negroes will be accepted in the “reserve components” of these branches of the service, where they will not be mixed with whites, although serving under white officers; they will be eligible to become petty (non-commissioned) officers, but not commissioned officers. All-Negro crews will be assigned to small craft and to serve around shore establishments and in navy yards; skilled workers among them will be gathered together into labor battalions and may eventually be sent to build bases outside of U.S. continental limits. Jim Crow training stations have already been selected to carry out this plan.

This is such an obvious evasion of the demand for Negro equality in the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard that even Randolph attacked it on the ground that “it accepts and extends and consolidates the policy of Jim Crowism in the Navy.” He also said that Negroes should “resent the stigma of inferiority and the status of vassals which Secretary Knox has affixed to them.” Randolph apparently does not realize that he is also condemning himself—for it was his own rotten policy that helped to make possible the extension and consolidation of Jim Crowism by the government.

The conditions of the Negro people are fully as bad as they were a year ago, and the Negro masses are fully aware of the fact. They are ready to take up the militant struggle where it was discontinued last year. Their eagerness for action, indeed, is so great that the Negro misleaders dare not openly counsel them to give up the struggle for equal rights, but have to confine themselves to repeating the refrain that “winning the war must come first, and we must not do anything to interfere with the prosecution of the war.” The Negro masses are not interested in interfering with the prosecution of the war, but for them winning the struggle against Jim Crowism

comes "first" because they know what is going to be their lot if the war against the Axis is won while the war against Jim Crowism is lost.

The conditions that lead to a renewed struggle, and the sentiments for conducting that struggle, both exist; the only thing lacking is a leadership with a militant program whom the masses would trust and follow. Where are they to find that leadership?

Lately Randolph is again talking about militant action against discrimination. But this year he will find it much harder to sell himself as the Moses of the Negro people. Randolph won the Springarn medal for outstanding service to the Negro people in 1941—but the decision to hand him a medal was made by people who shared his policies, not by the Negro masses who were so disgusted by his capitulation to Roosevelt; what they would have voted to give him he wouldn't have been able to wear. It would be putting it mildly to say that the advanced Negro workers do not trust Randolph and his type. They saw that he made many speeches about how necessary it was to win the "war for democracy"—but was not disposed to grant them any democracy in the movement which they were building at great expense and sacrifice. They've heard him make militant speeches before—and they've seen him crawl before the Jim Crow forces only a few days later. An index to Randolph's popularity among the Negro masses can be found in what happened after he called off the march; in the same speech announcing the granting of the "second Emancipation Proclamation," he pleaded with the Negro masses to remain in their local committees and to build them; but the masses paid no attention to him—the overwhelming majority walked out of the organization the same night they heard about the calling off of the march.

In an interview with the press early this April, Randolph declared that in view of "the continued discriminations against colored Americans in the Army, Navy, U.S. Marine and Air Corps, *as well as defense industries*" [what an admission about the executive order for which Randolph called off the march! —A.P.], it is necessary that "free, independent and courageous Negro leaders have a frank, candid and plain talk with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt about the whole situation."

Only one short year ago Randolph committed himself in

print to the following statements: "Evidently, the regular, normal and respectable method of conferences and petitions, while proper and ought to be continued as conditions warrant, certainly don't work. They don't do the job." "Negroes cannot stop discrimination . . . with conferences of leaders and the intelligentsia alone. While conferences have merit, they won't get the desired results by themselves." "Power and pressure do not reside in the few, the intelligentsia, they lie in and flow from the masses."

Whom shall the Negro masses believe—the Randolph of 1941 or the Randolph of 1942? Will they accept his story that what is now needed is a frank talk with Roosevelt—when he told them a year ago that such talks could accomplish nothing? Will they believe that their salvation now lies in the holding of local mass meetings, at which the part played by them will be limited to listening to Randolph explain about the need for a candid conversation with the president—when he told them a year ago that they had to put up a militant fight if they wanted to get *anything*, when he told them even after the march was called off that they had secured the executive order only by the threat of the march?

When we speak about Randolph's policies merging with those of the old-line fakers, we are speaking also of at least 99 per cent of the present leaders of the Negro people—for Randolph still speaks more militantly than most of them.

The Negro masses cannot turn to them for leadership in the coming struggle, nor can they turn to the Communist party, which has followed a policy since the march was called off fully as treacherous as that of Randolph and Co. Up until a week before the march was called off, the Stalinists had nothing but criticism for the Randolph leadership because its program did not go far enough, because it did not oppose the war. Then, three days before the executive order was signed, Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union, and the Stalinist policies in the United States underwent a rapid flip-flop. They hailed the executive order as a step forward, although it had, they admitted, some loopholes, and they made no criticism of Randolph for calling off the march.

Since then the Stalinists have gone much further along their treacherous road. In February of this year James W. Ford wrote a pamphlet entitled "The War and the Negro

People," in which he tried to justify the Stalinist policy by saying: "Four hundred years of Negro slavery are nothing besides Nazi persecution of Jewish peoples, peoples of the occupied countries, and 'races' of so-called 'inferior' status." In March, Eugene Gordon of the *Daily Worker* editorial staff came out at a symposium in opposition to the Double V slogan of the *Pittsburgh Courier* ("double victory for democracy at home and abroad") because, said the Stalinist, "Hitler is the main enemy" and the "foes of Negro rights in this country should be considered-as secondary." In April, the Stalinist controlled National Negro Congress was the most enthusiastic congratulator of Knox for his "bold, patriotic action in smashing age-old restrictions" in the Navy. Fortunately, the Stalinists are discredited among militant Negroes. The *Chicago Defender*, a Negro paper which had always sympathized with the Stalinist-led Congress, harshly denounced its statement on the Navy Jim Crow setup, saying that its leaders had broken faith with those "who looked to them as among our leaders" and that "they have destroyed their own influence and the influence of the organizations they represent."

An end to the Negro worker's acceptance of leadership from outside his own class! In the factories, thanks to the rise of the CIO, are Negro workers trained to represent their fellow-workers. Negroes are serving as grievance committeemen, shop stewards and local union officials, and are in the lead of the struggle in the shops to wipe out Jim Crowism. These Negro trade unionists, thanks to unionism, have developed from their experience the authority of confidence necessary to leaders. From the class struggle in the factories, as well as from their experience of Jim Crowism, they have learned that only the most resolute struggle will win economic, political and social equality. They have helped mightily to build the trade unions and know that the unions are the strongest allies of the Negro struggle. They know that black and white must unite because the white and Negro workers have common problems and a common enemy and must join their forces in common struggle. These Negro proletarian leaders—they are the ones to lead the Negro struggle. When their leadership is recognized and accepted by the great Negro masses—that will be the terrible day of judgment for the Southern Bourbons and their political agents!

THE MILITANT

a weekly newspaper

published in the interests of the working people
is an uncompromising fighter

For Full Social, Economic And Political Equality
For The Negro People



Each week THE MILITANT features a lively column

The Negro Struggle

by the Trotskyist writer, Albert Parker

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