

# Toward Freedom

**T**HE Philadelphia transit strike is only secondarily an expression of antagonism against the up-grading of Negro workers. It is primarily an organized attack against legitimate trade unionism and the war-government of our nation. As such, it holds important lessons for our country as a whole, and especially for the trade union movement.

Marxists have repeatedly pointed out that the rise of fascism and the necessities of this anti-fascist war have raised the traditional "Negro problem" to a new plane of urgency; that its prompt and fundamental solution can no longer be regarded as an ethical question of social justice, but must be viewed as a political question of national survival; and that the interests of all Americans require that the whole power of our government be thrown behind effective measures to uproot the virus of anti-Negroism—NOW.

Let us hope that the validity of these premises is at last being jolted into the consciousness of our nation by the outrageous Philadelphia strike which, as this is written, still continues in flagrant defiance of federal authority and with shocking disdain for the critical war needs of our country.

We must be intolerant of such "liberal" interpretations of this crisis as that set forth in I. F. Stone's dissertation on the rotten-



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ness of the "common man" (PM, Aug. 4). They contribute only confusion to a situation which our continued existence as a free nation now requires that we understand with utmost clarity.

**H**ERE is a situation in which (1) a would-be open-shop company still hopes to defeat legitimate unionism with which it is now legally obligated to bargain; (2) disgruntled leaders of a defeated company union still hope to regain their positions of prestige and power; (3) a rotten Republican city administration is eager to embarrass President Roosevelt, if for none other than narrow partisan reasons; and (4) even more sinister enemies of our nation are alert to an opportunity to disrupt vital war production in Hitler's hour of greatest need.

The up-grading of eight Negro workers by FEPC order provides the occasion for the outbreak. The latent prejudices of the white workers afford the means of mobilizing them against their own and the nation's interests. But the basic cause of this insurrection lies in the selfish and treasonous purposes of the groups by which it was engineered.

**T**HIS is what lies behind the transportation and war production tie-up in Philadelphia. And here are some of the main lessons it should teach our government and our unions:

## Lessons of the Transit Strike in Philadelphia

First, the federal government must act vigorously to wipe out every vestige of institutionalized racial (and religious) discrimination. Failure to do so leaves our nation vulnerable to precisely such attacks by our enemies as those we witnessed earlier in Detroit, Beaumont, Los Angeles, Mobile, New York, and which we now struggle to curb in Philadelphia.

In the immediate situation, federal troops should be used en masse to protect the workers who want to return to the lines. The Attorney General should throw McMenamin and all his co-conspirators in jail quickly.

In longer perspective, there must be passed and enforced, as a conscious and consistent national policy, whatever federal legislation is necessary to protect our country from such outrages.

Second, our trade unions, all of them, must place the education of their members on the "Negro question" uppermost on their agendas. Otherwise, as at Western Electric in Baltimore and elsewhere, they will find their organizing and bargaining efforts defeated on the false grounds of anti-Negroism. Much has been done along this line already, especially by the CIO, but the situation in Philadelphia is a measure of the vastness of the task still to be accomplished.

**H**ISTORY has catapulted the "Negro problem" into the forefront of national and international affairs. It can no longer be laid aside for future attention.