

Toward Freedom

The Reconstruction Goes On; Pepper, Hill Victories Spur It

LAST week's Democratic primary elections in Florida and Alabama reflect a growing trend which will yet bring freedom to the South. It will come, and the Negro people will play an important role in its achievement.

Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, and Senator Lister Hill of Alabama, won decisively. Representative Joe (Dies Committee) Starnes of Alabama, was defeated. And Negroes voted in the "white primaries" of both states!

Consternation reigns in the camp of the Bourbon South, and well it might. These are but portends of even greater democratic triumphs which will shatter their already crumbling edifice of white supremacy.

Sen. Pepper does not "belong" to the Old South, but represents an emerging progressive element in Southern politics. Foe of the polltax, champion of New Deal legislation, supporter of President Roosevelt's win-the-war program and Administration spokesman on foreign policy, he is the antithesis of that still-dominant political reaction which has kept the Southern white and Negro masses in semi-feudal oppression since the late 1870's.

The whole arsenal of Bourbon power was



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unleashed to assure his defeat. His reelection by the democratic pro-Roosevelt masses strikingly heralds the coming of a new day.

Sen. Hill is also strongly pro-Roosevelt; he faced implacable opposition from the Bourbon rulers. Representative Starnes is the embodiment of that sinister wartime merger of Southern reaction and pro-fascist defeatism which seriously imperils the nation; he was strongly supported by the Bourbons. In the victory of one and the defeat of the other, the growing power of the democratic masses is again recorded.

It is grievous, of course, that Pepper and Hill considered it necessary to make appeasement gestures to the vicious anti-Negroism which characterized the campaigns of their opponents. But this error is far less significant than the victory of those broad democratic, pro-Roosevelt forces whose continued growth alone can bring freedom to all the people of the South.

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IN THESE first tests of the Supreme Court decision in the Texas "white primary" case, Negroes flocked to the polls in Florida and Alabama—and voted! This was not everywhere true, but the trend is of major importance. Moreover, with a new militancy born of the war, aroused Negro citizens are organ-

izing and registering all over the South.

Some disillusioned liberals are unduly impressed by the rantings of the white supremacists. But with all their shouting the reactionaries can neither stop nor conceal the basic changes now under way in the South.

With the "white primary" declared unconstitutional and the polltax on the way out (never fear, it will go), the main "legal" bases of Southern disfranchisement are tottering. The strong democratic currents set into motion by the New Deal have been accelerated by the impact of this people's war. The rapid urbanizations and industrialization of the South strike at the foundations of Bourbon power. The growing organization of Southern workers and the increasing struggles of the Negro people represent emerging political forces to challenge entrenched reaction.

The common impression of a static South is illusory, and the recent Alabama and Florida Democratic primary elections underscore this basic truth.

During one brief decade of Reconstruction, the white and Negro masses, buttressed by a strong and progressive federal government, set out to build a new and promising democracy in the South. The completion of this task is again on the agenda of history. It will be carried through by those pro-Roosevelt forces which defeated Starnes and reelected Pepper and Hill.