

Toward Freedom

'Education' vs. 'Legislation' On Negro Rights

THAT old wheeze about "You can't legislate racial attitudes" is being used again to retard progress toward Negro democratic rights. This time the main target is pending FEPC legislation in Washington and in Albany.

Republican Sen. Taft, callously disregarding the GOP platform pledge and the Dewey campaign promise of a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee, seeks to justify his dishonest "voluntary" FEPC bill on the grounds that the use of force in wiping out employment discrimination would create trouble, that we've got to "educate" people to different attitudes first.



Similarly the New York Board of Trade, the State Chamber of Commerce, and now that rock-ribbed Republican newspaper, the World-Telegram, are trying to block creation of a N. Y. State Commission Against Discrimination (a little "FEPC") on the grounds that what we need is not legislation, but "education and persuasion." As the World-Telegram puts it: "Until education has accomplished a good deal more, even a well-meant bill like this anti-discrimination measure would, we fear, retard rather than advance the progress hoped for."

Of course, Taft, the Board of Trade, the World-Telegram and the reactionary forces for whom they speak are lying in their professed endorsement of the "admirable purpose and aim" of proposed FEPC legislation. The real purpose behind their alleged objec-

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tion to coercive "methods" is to protect their vested interests in employment discrimination. All this tommyrot about "education and persuasion" is designed to pull the wool over the eyes of a gullible public.

Their tactics would not be so dangerous but for the fact that great masses of our citizens actually are taken in by this "education-not-legislation" program. They fail to realize that it is not now, and never has been, a correct formula for social progress in general, and certainly not for progress toward full Negro democratic rights. Let me illustrate.

Early in our national defense program, employers, politicians and many citizens "knew" that white and Negro workers simply could not work together in airplane factories and many other then lily-white war plants; that white workers would not stand for it. They contended that we must enter upon a long and gradual process of "education" to change attitudes, rather than try legislation or other forms of coercion.

BUT the war couldn't wait for this long process of education. We had to have airplanes quick, thousands of them, and we had to use all available manpower to make them—even if this meant using Negro workers. So we used force—anti-discrimination clauses in war contracts, FEPC hearings and directives, WMC and USES pressures, along with the struggles of the unions and other progressive groups. And Negro workers were employed.

What happened? Negro workers began to do any job anyone else could do. They and

their white fellow-workers came to know and respect one another in the shops and in the union halls (a thing which anti-Negro discrimination and segregation are designed to prevent). New bonds of interracial unity were formed. Many genuine friendships developed. The dire predictions about bloody race riots simply did not materialize.

THERE was a mass change of attitudes, but it came **AFTER**, not before, the change in objective social conditions.

However "reasonable" the change-attitudes-first formula may seem, it just does not square with the facts of social change. Not only with regard to Negro and white war-workers, but throughout history, it has been demonstrated that significant human progress always comes through struggle and historic necessity; and that once social conditions are changed, the masses of men readily adapt their attitudes to the new circumstances under which they live.

It is extremely important for America that existing attitudes of antipathy toward racial and religious minorities be changed, but we cannot rely upon the gradual process of education to do the job. Rather, we must struggle to create social conditions in which men find it possible and necessary to change their attitudes.

The best way to wipe out attitudes against the full employment of Negroes, both in New York State and in the nation at large, is to fight for quick passage of permanent FEPC legislation—with teeth, and then to continue fighting for its enforcement. This is the valid formula for progressive social change.