

Toward Freedom

MOST of our great trade unions cannot possibly avoid the problem of the Negro's continued right to work after the war in thousands of plants where that right has but recently been won. History will thrust the problem upon them—indeed, it is already doing so. And developments of the next few months could easily bring our unions face-to-face with a serious situation which they are not prepared to handle.

There is no escaping the fact that there must be enormously more trade union discussion and planning to meet the threat which reconversion cutbacks will bring—are now bringing!—to the employment rights of hundreds of thousands of Negro workers. And I know of nothing that would contribute more to this end than for thousands of white and Negro trade unionists to read the National Negro Congress' new pamphlet on **Negro Workers After the War**.

In a simple and effective style, this 23-page pamphlet recounts the changes the war has made in the composition of the American working class, and the unprecedented entrance and general acceptance of Negro workers in industry. It also reports the results of



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NNC-union-management investigations, which reveal that if reconversion layoffs follow traditional seniority practices, most of these Negro workers will be the "first fired," and in many plants and departments they will be wiped out entirely.

ALL of which poses the question: "Will the unions, which have made such magnificent advances in tearing down the color barrier, allow unmodified and unadjusted seniority rules to become an instrument whereby pre-war discriminations may be frozen into postwar industry, the unions disrupted, the Negro and white workers alike weakened in organizational power?"

The NNC pamphlet, with full appreciation of the absolute necessity of holding the policy of seniority intact, suggests that the procedural application of this policy now calls for modification. "Seniority rules that were adequate three years ago may no longer reflect the actual situation. With a shifting scene, they may stand in need of adjustment, like scientific instruments whose headings require correction because of varying temperatures, atmospheric pressures, and the like. The instrument is not rejected; it is adjusted."

The Negro Worker After the War

The pamphlet expresses no surprise or alarm over the fact that this "most hotly contested" proposal for seniority adjustment has not brought "instantly unanimous" opinion in the trade union movement. "This problem has no precedent. It is new to history." Nor does the pamphlet propose "detailed plans for seniority adjustment. That is the job of the unions. It is they who must take the initiative."

WHAT The Negro Worker After the War does do is to pose the problem of postwar Negro layoffs on the basis of objective facts, to suggest seniority adjustments as one way of meeting it, and then to examine and evaluate the main arguments for and against that proposal. It also expresses confidence "that the unions, whose white and Negro brothers and sisters have fought so splendidly for the Negro people, will take whatever measures are needed to maintain the gains of wartime."

I share that confidence. But I should like to see the unions step up their now laggard consideration of the problem by the mass distribution of **The Negro Worker After the War**. The pamphlet costs only five cents, is available at most progressive bookshops, and can be ordered from the National Negro Congress, 307 Lenox Ave., New York 27, N. Y.