

Three Centuries of Struggle For Negro Democratic Rights

By Doxey Wilkerson
(Continued from Yesterday)
Civil War and Reconstruction

Marxists speak of the Civil War-Reconstruction period as the Second American (bourgeois-democratic) Revolution. It was issued in an essentially progressive war, which began with no intention of abolishing slavery, but was inevitably transformed into an abolition war. It was carried forward by a

coalition of northern industrialists, free farmers, sections of the middle class, and the Negro people, with the support of the emerging workingmen's associations. The coalition was led by Lincoln, and was expressed politically by the new-born Republican Party.

Military destruction of the slaveholders of the Confederacy was the principal task of the first phase of this Second American Revolution. After a year and a half of vacillation and defeat for the North, truly revolutionary measures were employed. The slaves were freed and armed. The military forces of the Union then began to triumph.

The principal tasks of the second phase of the revolution (1865-77) were to prevent the restoration of power to the slave-masters, to extend democratic rights to the freedmen, and to institute democratic government in the South. Again truly revolutionary methods were employed. The 14th and 15th Amendments granted full citizenship rights to the Negro people. Leaders of the Confederacy were disfranchised, and governmental authority—supported by an enlightened military dictatorship—was transferred to the hands of the former slaves, the white free-holders ("scalawags"), and their Abolitionist allies from the North ("carpetbaggers"). New democratic state governments emerged from a whole series of people's constitutional assemblies. The "Black Codes" were abolished. The first state systems of free public schools were established. Equal rights legislation was passed. Some steps were taken toward land reform.

Through the firm coalition of the Negro people and their progressive allies, Negro freedom was achieved and extended, democracy for the whole South leaped ahead, and the Union was preserved intact.

The fatal error of the Second American Revolution was failure to expropriate the lands of the former slave-holders and distribute them to the freedmen. This would have removed at one stroke the chief material basis for the political restoration of the old ruling class. As it was, retention of the landed estates of the slave system paved the way for the ultimate defeat of the revolution.

Restoration of Reaction

The election of Hayes to the presidency in 1876 came through a "treaty of peace" between the leaders of the Republican Party and the former Confederate statesmen. The northern bourgeoisie had accomplished their main purpose—to break the economic and political stranglehold of slavery on the nation. They now were eager for a period of social peace in which to get the full benefits of the plantation system and the new internal markets for the further development of their industries. Moreover, they were confronted with troubles of their own—an upsurge of organized labor, mounting woman suffrage agitation, and a threatened revolt of the farmers. The big bourgeoisie were willing to strike a bargain with the ex-slave-owners in order to get peace.

Thus it was that the so-called "Party of Lincoln" betrayed the revolution which the democratic coalition around Lincoln had won, deserting the Negro people to the tender mercies of their former slave-masters.

The withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877 marked the beginning of the counter-revolution. It was harsh and bloody business. The Negroes were disarmed and forced back to the plantations—into a semi-feudal system of "share-cropping." They were disfranchised, barred from juries and public office, and subject to constant lynch terror. The new systems of free public schools were abolished—not only for the Negroes, but also for the whites. The Ku Klux Klan was the chief army of the counter-revolution; and the doctrine of "white supremacy" (used to divide the coalition of Negroes and poor whites) was its chief ideological weapon. Much the same slogan and tactics of reaction were used to defeat the Populist Movement of the 1890's.

By the turn of the century, the Old South was firmly in power. Between 1890 and 1910, the victory of the counter-revolution was consolidated by a whole series of legal measures of discrimination. The status of the Negro people was definitely fixed as that of an inferior caste—disfranchised, lynched, Jim Crowed, and barred from industrial employment.

Yet, in their long struggle for freedom, marked by one glorious period of rapidly developing democracy, something of tremendous importance had happened to the Negro people. Concentrated in the "black belt," where they held a numerical majority, the diverse African tribesmen and their descendants had acquired a common language—English. They had been transformed into a predominantly agricultural people. They had acquired a common culture and common traditions—the slave insurrections and the spirituals. Their common aspirations for freedom had given them a definite group consciousness. Effective leaders had emerged among them. The Negro people were beginning to take on the characteristics of an oppressed nation, and the question of their liberation would some day again be on the agenda of history.

World War I and the Depression

The first major break in the caste-status of the Negro people came with the great migrations during and after World War I. Between 1916 and 1923, one million Negroes shifted from semi-feudal plantation regions into the heart of the highly developed capitalist regions of the country. A Negro proletariat was created in the North. Even so, Jim Crow restrictions, wage differentials, AFL exclusiveness, and the use of Negro workers as strike-breakers—all operated to prevent the Negro migrants from entering northern industry on an equal footing with white workers. By the same token, these measures prevented the unification of the white and Negro proletariat for the solution of their common problems.

This wartime entrance of Negro workers into northern industry, together with the demagogic promises of the Wilson Administration of better days to come—"after the war," raised anew the hopes of the Negro people for the achievement of full citizenship. Instead, they were subjected to a wave of bloody anti-Negro riots and mounting racial discrimination in the northern industrial cities, wholesale post-war discharge from their new-found jobs, and growing repression and terror in the South.

These fruits of the First World War thoroughly disillusioned the Negro people. Their experiences during the early days of the depression seemed but to aggravate their unhappy plight. The perspective for achieving Negro democratic and social rights was then very dim, indeed.

(The last of this series of articles by Doxey Wilkerson will appear in tomorrow's paper).

At the Irving Place

Today through Sunday, the Irving Place Theatre presents "Three Soviet Women" starring Zoya Fyodorova ("Girl From Leningrad") plus, "Confessions of a Cheat."

THE STAGE

"A Gripping Play."
Ralph Warner, Daily Worker

"DECISION"
BELASCO THEATRE 44th Street,
E. of 5th Ave. BR. 9-2987
Even. Incl. Sun. 8:40. Mats. Sat., Sun. & Feb. 22

5th Year! "A PERFECT COMEDY."
—ATKINSON, Times

LIFE WITH FATHER

Howard LINDSAY Dorothy STICKNEY
269 SEATS at \$1.10
EMPIRE THEATRE, Broadway at 40th Street
Evenings 8:00. Mats. SAT. and TUE., at 2:40

MICHAEL TODD presents
BOBBY CLARK in
MEXICAN HAYRIDE

by Herbert & Dorothy Fields
Staged by HASSARD SHORT



Josh White of Cafe Society Downtown, tries out a new song about the Red Army for Paul Robeson backstage at "Othello." Josh will present the number at a Red Army Day celebration sponsored by the Greenwich-Gramercy Park Committee of Russian War Relief on Saturday night, Feb. 19 at the Roof Terrace, 13 Astor Place. Mr. Robeson is one of the sponsors of the affair.

Shostakovich's Eighth Will Have American Premier April 2

The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York has announced that Dimitri Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony will be given its Western Hemisphere premiere over the nation-wide Columbia network Sunday, April 2, in a program sponsored by United States Rubber Co. (WABC-CBS, 3:00 to 4:30 P. M., EWT).

Dr. Arthur Rodzinski will conduct the New York Philharmonic-

Symphony in the premiere, as he agreed last October.

The score of the eagerly-awaited composition was brought to the United States by Bill Downs, CBS correspondent, Jan. 21 on his return from Moscow.

The world premiere of the Eighth Symphony took place in Moscow, Nov. 4, at a concert of the State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Eugen Mravinsky.



Jose Ferrer, Uta Hagen, Muriel Smith and Ed Garner (Duffy Taverner's Archie) pack up a box to be sent to the children of Stalingrad. The affair is under the auspices of the Ambijan Committee.

Joined by Elizabeth Berger, Alexander Kipnis and others they will

MOTION PICTURES

SOVIET RUSSIA'S TRIBUTE TO WOMANHOOD
THREE SOVIET WOMEN
Music by SHOSTAKOVICH
Dedicated to ROMAN ROLLAND
IRVING Place *NOW THRU SUNDAY*

ENGLISH VERSION
"CONFESSIONS OF A CHEAT"
THE WITTIEST, DE-LIGHTFUL FILM
NEAR 14th ST. & UNION SQ. *POPULAR LUNCH*
NOW THRU SUNDAY PRICES 10c-50c

8th BIG WEEK!
BORRY, NO CHILDREN PLEASE!



APOLLO 42 ST West of 5th Ave. 10c-50c

NOW PLAYING THRU NEXT WEEK
ERIC VON STROHEIM
"IT HAPPENED IN GIBRALTAR"
French Film—English Titles
—ALSO—
'LENINGRAD MUSIC HALL'
And Added Attraction
LABOR FRONT

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
LIFEBOAT
TALLULAH BANKHEAD
with WILLIAM BRIDGES
ASTOR 8:45-11