

Toward Freedom

THIS people's war and the necessities which flow from it have done more than anything in recent history to hasten progress toward the goal of full democratic rights for the Negro people. But the war has done more; it has taught us how to fight for Negro rights—and win!

An important lesson on the right and wrong ways to struggle for Negro rights can be learned by analyzing the different reactions of Negro groups to the proposed drafting of Army nurses and of civilian workers. One type of response operates further to advance the Negro's progress toward freedom; the other leads to his isolation and defeat.

For example, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses supports whatever measures are necessary to guarantee adequate medical care for our fighting men abroad, and at the same time it demands that Army nurse service be placed "on the basis of need of care for American soldiers and not on the basis of limitations because of race, color or national origin." In contrast, the Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, justly incensed over existing discriminations against Negro nurses, declares that it is "unalterably opposed" to the drafting of nurses for Army service.

To take another example, the National Negro Congress fully endorses President



by **Doxey A. Wilkerson**

Roosevelt's call for a national service act to guarantee that maximum use be made of war manpower to assure the quickest possible victory over our fascist enemies, and at the same time it calls for "necessary guarantees that labor and the Negro people will be fully and democratically utilized in the struggle for total victory." In contrast, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People flatly rejects all national service legislation, repeats the Socialist line that compulsory war work would be "slavery," and declares that "Negroes will be restricted and ordered about on the basis of color rather than on the basis of the country's needs."

THE one raises the demand for extending Negro rights as a means of winning the war. It links the Negro up directly with the war effort, thereby gaining the support of broad masses of win-the-war Americans who become allies in the Negro's struggle for equal rights. Moreover, it brings a positive note of confidence to the struggle, seeking to strengthen and extend the already progressive liberating influence of the war. This is the way to win.

The other raises the demand for extended Negro rights as a condition for support of the war. It places the Negro in opposition to the nation's war effort, thereby alienating broad masses of win-the-war Americans who should—and could—be made our allies, but who instead are made our opponents. Moreover,

How to Fight For Negro Rights

it brings a negative note of defeatism to the struggle, ignoring the positive liberating influences of this people's war and assuming at the outset, that real democratic progress is impossible. This is the way to lose.

ORGANIZATIONS engaged in the fight for Negro rights would do well to learn something from the changing wartime relations between the Negro people and the rest of the country. We are no longer in the oppressive 1920's or 1930's; this is a period of ascendancy for the Negro people and all other democratic forces in our country. Despite occasional set-backs here and there, the dominant trend of our society is now forward toward greater freedom and security for all men. We can strengthen and extend that trend through the fullest possible support for the war from which it emerges.

If we are wise, we will stop calling for Negro democratic rights as if they were some special group interests apart from—or even opposed to—the war effort. Instead, we will fight to enlarge democratic rights for the Negro people as a necessary means to hasten our country's victory over the common fascist enemies of us all.

To say that fuller democracy for the Negro people is necessary to hasten victory is no mere "tactical" use of words; this is one of the most profound truths of this period. Let us take the fullest possible advantage of this new relationship between the Negro and the nation—for along that path lies the coming victory of both.