

Defending the FEPC

By Doxey Wilkerson

President Roosevelt continues to fight for FEPC. Let labor and all other people's organizations rally to his support in this struggle. The threatened destruction of FEPC would be a disastrous blow to war production and to the growing anti-fascist unity of the American people.

The Committee on Fair Employment Practice was first authorized in June, 1941, by Executive Order



8802, and was later reorganized and strengthened in May, 1943, by Executive Order 9346. It now consists of a chairman and six members, representing labor and management in equal numbers. The committee maintains central offices in Washington, D. C., and nine regional offices. It employs a staff of 113 workers, more than half of whom are in the field.

At a time when the nation faces a critical shortage of manpower to back the coming invasion of Europe, when the home-front conflict between the political forces of democracy and fascism grows increasingly acute, it is well to recall the purpose, accomplishments, and still undone tasks of FEPC. They serve to highlight the urgent need for real mass struggle to protect this vital war agency from the three-pronged attack it now faces.

In Executive Order 9346, President Roosevelt declared that "the successful prosecution of the war demands the maximum employment of all available workers regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin." He established "a new Committee on Fair Employment Practice, to promote the fullest utilization of all available manpower, and to eliminate discriminatory employment practices." To the four categories of discrimination listed in the Order, he later

added unwarranted discrimination against non-citizens.

JURISDICTION

The committee has jurisdiction over complaints of employment discrimination on the part of all agencies of the Federal Government, all employers holding government contracts, all other employers engaged in essential war production, and the unions of workers in such agencies and establishments.

FEPC receives and handles a tremendous volume of complaints of employment discrimination. There were 1,616 cases pending on July 1, 1943. An additional 1,930 cases were docketed during the following six months. During this same period, 969 cases were satisfactorily closed, leaving a case load of 1,967 pending complaints on Jan. 1, 1944.

Over three-fourths of the 1,930 cases docketed during the last half of 1943 concerned employment discriminations based on race or color, directed chiefly against Negroes. It is notable, however, that there were 189 cases (10 per cent) of discrimination against religious groups, chiefly Jews; 132 cases (7 per cent) involving non-citizens; and 99 cases (5 per cent) involving foreign-born citizens. Some 1,264 of the complaints were against private employers; 584 were against government agencies; and 82 were against labor unions, almost entirely AFL.

Despite its limited staff and the magnitude of its job, FEPC gets results. That is why it is fought so bitterly by southern "white supremacy" Democrats and defeatist-led Republicans. That is also why the democratic, win-the-war forces of our country must fight back with all the vigor they can command. FEPC is an indispensable instrument of victory for the Negro and other minority peoples, for organized labor, and for our embattled nation as a whole.

In every major crisis the President has fought for FEPC. Last spring, when the committee was disintegrating following WMC Commissioner Paul McNutt's suspension

of the railroad hearings, the President reorganized and strengthened the committee, removed it from WMC jurisdiction, and authorized the railroad hearings to proceed. Last fall, when Comptroller-General Lindsay Warren ruled that FEPC directives did not have the force of "orders," the President promptly reversed the ruling and declared that FEPC directives must be obeyed.

GREATEST THREAT

Now, FEPC faces the greatest threat in its history. The reactionary Howard Smith Committee is pushing forward its smear "investigation," and thereby tying up top FEPC officials to prevent the effective conduct of their work. The Senate recently passed the Richard Russell amendment which would kill FEPC unless it receives a Congressional appropriation for its work after June 30, 1944.

But the President continues to fight for FEPC. Probably anticipating the Senate's action, he asked Congress for an appropriation of \$585,000 to enlarge the field staff and carry on the essential war functions of FEPC. It is against this appropriation that the reactionaries now turn their fire. It is to the support of this appropriation that the progressive forces of our country now must throw their full political power.

Send thousands of letters and telegrams to the House Appropriations Committee, demanding approval of the \$585,000 FEPC appropriation. Send copies and letters of support to President Roosevelt.

This is the way to preserve and strengthen FEPC's much-needed services in providing the manpower necessary to back up the coming Allied invasion of Europe.

This is also the way to strengthen the political unity of organized labor, the Negro people and all other democratic forces for victory in the 1944 elections, for victory in the war, and for victory in the peace which will follow.