

Negro Trade Unionists

By **Doxey Wilkerson**

I have said quite a bit in this column about the urgent necessity for the labor movement to become more aggressive in fighting for Negro democratic rights.

It is time to emphasize also the special responsibilities of Negro members of trade unions. They have an important job to do during this period—for their unions, for the Negro people, and for our nation as a whole.



The labor movement, despite notable exceptions, is the most powerful ally of the Negro people in their struggle toward freedom. A strong, democratic and unified labor movement is also the greatest bulwark of our nation against the current threat of fascist reaction. A politically alert and active labor movement is the best possible guarantee that the democratic forces of our nation will emerge triumphant in the crucial 1944 elections.

Without such a labor movement, there can be no progressive solution for the truly critical problems which now confront both the Negro people and the nation. From this fact there should flow a number of practical implications for the role which Negro trade unionists should now play.

I learn more and more of situations in which Negro trade unionists tend to isolate themselves from their white fellow-unionists, either because of internal union factional conflicts in which they have no

special interest, or because the union's program gives too little attention to the struggle for Negro rights.

Many Negro trade unionists seldom, if ever, attend meetings of their locals. If present, they take little or no part in discussions on issues which do not specifically concern the Negro. Sometimes they grumble on the outside about the union's failure to act on Negro grievances.

There are a few cases in which Negro members have organized a separate "Negro bloc" within the union, throwing their voting strength opportunistically to whichever leaders promise most "recognition" to the Negro, without regard to the more fundamental principles of trade union and national welfare which are at stake in internal conflicts within their organizations.

None of these approaches offers any solution at all to the problem of moving the unions into more active participation in the struggle for Negro democratic rights. The Negro trade unionist must play a much more positive and constructive role.

Let the Negro union member become active in promoting the general program of his union. He thereby wins respect and influence with which to fight for more vigorous union support for those measures in which he has a special interest.

Let the Negro trade unionist rally consistently behind the progressive, win-the-war leadership of his union. He therefore helps to build the kind of organization which is

able and willing to fight for the extension of democracy for the Negro people and the nation as a whole.

Let the Negro trade unionist throw himself fully into the development of a vital program of political action for his union. He thereby contributes his most to the returning to the White House and to Congress in the fall of 1944 of a government which is friendly to the Negro people, friendly to the labor movement and committed to the winning of a people's victory and a people's peace.

Negro trade unionists must do their utmost to win thousands more of their Negro fellow-workers to the ranks of organized labor. They must attend union meetings regularly and take an active part in all the programs of their locals. Especially must they collaborate with those forces within their unions which seek to unite the membership behind truly progressive policies of political action.

This is the way to help build unions which will exert increasing pressure for the achievement of Negro democratic rights.

This is the way to secure Negro war-workers against the threat of wholesale layoffs when the time for personnel cut-backs arrives.

This is the way to strengthen the labor movement for effective struggles to realize the democratic perspective of Tehran.

This is the way in which Negro trade unionists can now best promote the welfare of their unions, the Negro people and the nation as a whole.