

Toward Freedom

THE traditional Jimcrow policy of the Army of the United States is facing a crisis.

A number of current developments, some positive and some negative, are placing the question of military equality for the Negro people on the agenda of history for early and constructive settlement.

First, and of paramount importance, are the iron necessities of victory at the front. Herein lies the direct and immediate explanation of last week's decision by the Supreme Command to assign white and Negro soldiers to fight side by side



in hastening the defeat of our Nazi enemy on the western front.

The transcendent importance of this event cannot be overestimated. It represents the first break in the hard crust of Army Jimcrow. Like so many other anti-Negro bars in civilian and military life, the heretofore rigid policy of separating white and Negro combat units has at last yielded under the impact of urgent war necessity.

We are reminded of the wholly unwarranted cynicism with which the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and many others greeted President Roosevelt's statement last month that: "Steps have been

by Doxey A. Wilkerson

taken by the Army from time to time to correct unfair racial situations. Most assuredly this process will be repeated in the future."

The President's assertion has been fully confirmed. Moreover, this latest progressive step toward military equality opens a breach in the Army's Jimcrow policy which can, and will be widened as the struggle for victory and security proceeds.

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SECOND, and likewise of major importance, are the demonstrations by Negro men and women in the armed forces against the degrading Jimcrow conditions imposed upon them. There has been a whole series of so-called "mutiny" cases, a dramatic "hunger strike" by 1,000 Seabees on the west coast, and most recently the "sitdown strike" for which four Negro WACs at Ft. Devens were convicted and sentenced last week.

Let it be clear that such demonstrations as these cannot be condoned and must not be encouraged. They are direct strikes against the war, and even though provoked by dastardly conditions which in themselves greatly hamper the war effort, they can no more be condoned than strikes by industrial workers against war production. Moreover, such demonstrations are tactically wrong; in the nature of the case they cannot win.

Nevertheless, these outbreaks among Negro

First Break Through In Army Jimcrow

men and women in the armed forces can readily be understood. Here these citizens are officially subjected in many places to humiliating prejudice and discrimination under conditions which they are powerless either to avoid or correct—and in the midst of a people's war for freedom! No wonder many of them blow up. The circumstances surrounding their offense against military discipline certainly warrant the utmost leniency in the imposition of sentences.

The most basic significance of these protest demonstrations is that they are dramatic symptoms of the divisive and serious cancer of military Jimcrow. They reflect a problem which the Army and Navy simply cannot longer ignore without real peril to military efficiency as well as to that national unity essential to consolidate in peace the victory we are winning on the field of battle.

FINALLY, and underlying all other progressive developments during this period, is the general democratic upsurge which springs from this liberating war, which is profoundly affecting the whole political and social structure of our country and the world. Even the long-standing and well-crystallized policy of Jimcrow in the Army and Navy cannot long withstand the current inexorable march of all mankind toward a better and freer world.