

the NEW NEGRO

By JAMES RORTY

Condensed from Brother Jim Crow.

Discrimination against Negroes in industry, color bars in union constitutions and rituals, a Jim Crow army and navy—all these things are strictly in the pattern of Hitlerian racism which we are fighting. Contemporary liberals, progressive laborites and churchmen cannot evade or compromise this issue any more than the Abolitionists could compromise the issue of chattel slavery. They will be well advised, incidentally, to realize that in any case the Negroes themselves will not compromise it.

All sections of Negro opinion are united in the demand for full economic and social, as well as political, equality. This, as A. Philip Randolph has recently pointed out, is not something to be alarmed about. On the contrary it is a basically healthy manifestation, which, given the support of informed white liberals both north and south, will do much to ease tensions and facilitate the transition to a new and far sounder phase of race relationships in this country. As A. Philip Randolph wrote in a recent letter:

“How can the Negro be expected to participate morally and

spiritually in this People's War unless at the same time he is permitted—even encouraged—to fight whole-heartedly for participation at home in the common rights of our common American heritage which have been so long denied him? Indeed, how can we Negroes expect you whites to respect us until you see that we have discarded the last vestige of the slave's embittered subservience, the last corrosive dregs of psychological inferiority and belligerency? . . . Until, in short, you see a new Negro standing erect in the living room of his own soul. . . .”

Will the war and the People's Peace—when, as and if—open a new day for this New Negro whom Randolph proclaims?

The issue is far from settled. All one can say is that the status quo is broken and cannot be restored: not in industry, nor in education, not even in the army and navy where the concessions to pressure have been least significant. We must go either backward or forward. If we are to escape being overwhelmed by a wave of reaction more devastating than that which followed World War I it had better be forward—and fast.