

# WASHINGTON WEEKLY

BY PAUL W. WARD

## Wooring the Negro Vote

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WITH unwonted fairness the front pages of the Ku Klux press on November 4 may scream: "Negroes Reelect Roosevelt President." There will be several grounds on which to base that assertion if Roosevelt wins by only a narrow margin. Chief among them is the fact that, technically, Negroes hold the balance of power in one or more states that Roosevelt must carry to renew his White House lease. The others involve the Democrats' elaborate and unprecedented efforts to woo the colored gentry away from the G.O.P. and the signs—already visible—that the Negroes are succumbing in large numbers to this political seduction.

It is easy to show why, of all the minority groups in the nation, the one of outstanding political importance at the moment is that one-and-a-half per cent splinter made up of native-born Negroes living in the North. One begins by pointing out that Roosevelt is certain to get at least 230 electoral votes. There is no space here to explain why that is so, but a glance at the list of states and their electoral ratings, coupled with even a modicum of political knowledge, will suffice to show its verity. Roosevelt will need, then, only 36 of the remaining 301 votes and, given the elements necessary to make the finish a tight one, he will have to get those votes from one or more of five northern states. Those states—New York, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Ohio—form a block of 157 electoral votes. All five are normally Republican and, together, they have nearly 1,500,000 potential Negro voters—enough, if they desert the party of Lincoln for the party of the Solid South, to place all of these states in the Democratic column. Pennsylvania's thirty-six votes would be just enough to put Roosevelt across the finish line a winner. And Pennsylvania, where the margin of victory for either Roosevelt or Landon probably will not exceed 100,000 votes, has approximately 285,000 Negroes of voting age, or enough, if they shift, to wipe out the margin of 157,592 votes by which Hoover carried the state in 1932.

The picture is substantially the same in the four other key states with the exception that, unlike Pennsylvania, they plunked for Roosevelt in 1932. In Michigan, where Roosevelt's margin was 131,806, there are 118,000 potential Negro voters, most of whom were still voting for the Great Emancipator and the G.O.P. four years ago, and Michigan has 19 electoral votes. Ohio, where Roosevelt's margin was 74,016, has 206,000 potential Negro voters and 26 electoral votes. Illinois has 230,000 Negroes of voting age and 29 electoral votes. New York, whose capture by Roosevelt would give him 47 electoral votes and certain victory, has 293,000 potential Negro voters. There

are at least four other states in which the vote of the colored brethren is important, and two of them are in the South, but all four seem already to be securely fixed in the Roosevelt column. One of these is Indiana, which has 14 electoral votes and 75,000 Negroes of voting age. Another is Missouri with 15 electoral votes and 152,000 potential Negro voters. The other two are Kentucky and Tennessee, so-called "border" states where for many years in certain sections Negroes have been permitted to vote not only in general elections but also in the far more important primaries.

With the strategical importance of the Negro vote in the campaign demonstrated, the next question is: How will that vote go? There is plenty of evidence of a heavy drift toward Roosevelt. Down in Louisville, which due to the Negro vote had had an almost unbroken string of Republican mayors and Congressmen since the Civil War, the colored people shifted their party affiliations in 1934 and presented the city with a Democratic mayor and a Democratic Congressman. The boss of Memphis also has discovered that they can be made to vote Democratic. In Chicago in 1934 they ousted the Negro Congressman, De Priest, a Republican, and put in his place another Negro, Mitchell, who is a Democrat. The North Carolina Democratic convention a few weeks ago seated a Negro delegate from Raleigh. At Durham in that same solidly Democratic state two Negro magistrates recently were elected, swept into office on their promise to be hard with landlords seeking eviction notices. If further examples of the trend be needed, there are the unprecedentedly heavy votes cast by Negro districts in the recent Democratic primaries in Ohio and Illinois.

Despite all this, the possibilities of error in gauging the drift of the Negro vote are enormous. It is easy to underestimate the grip which Republican machine bosses have upon the 1,500,000 potential Negro voters in the five key states. Only the members of the upper crust of the Negro community are to any appreciable degree political free agents. The rest do not vote; they are voted. Like his white brothers living in similar squalor in the industrial bowels and backwaters of cities, the Negro has been notoriously venal, placing his vote at the disposal of whichever machine at the moment can pay the highest price. The G.O.P. will have buying power again this year—bigger buying power, probably, than ever before—and all the factors which should make the Negro want to vote for Roosevelt must be discounted in the light of that fact.

There are, of course, a great many reasons why the Negro, if left to his personal predilections, should want to vote for Roosevelt. They begin with the fact that the Negro masses have never got anything in return for their allegiance to the G.O.P. Such favors as that party has dis-

tributed to Negroes when in power have gone to a few hacks with a coefficient of respect and actual leadership among Negroes about equal to that of Tom Heflin among the Boston Irish. The party has a better record than that of the Democrats on racial issues, but only on paper, and it has done nothing to improve its station in the past year. The agitation for anti-lynching legislation in the last Congress came chiefly from Democrats, and the one Presidential aspirant who ran into a barrage of organized Negro opposition was a Republican, Borah, who was condemned for his stand on anti-lynching legislation. At the party's recent national convention in Cleveland, it compounded all its recent errors with respect to the Negro vote by seating no colored delegates save those in the bought-and-paid-for black-and-tan delegations, which the veteran Perry Howard and the ineffable Tieless Joe Talbert brought up from South Carolina and Mississippi.

There will be time enough between now and November 3, however, for the Republicans to cover up most of those errors with new blandishments and dough. Their current lethargy springs only from a desire to keep their money bags as fat as possible as long as possible. They will spring into action in the black wards on September 1. When they do, it will be to talk not about their errors but about those of the Democrats. Professor Carpenter, the former Buffalo director of the League for Industrial Democracy, who is now a member of the G O P. "brain trust," began some weeks ago the preparation of a pamphlet on Senator Joe T. (for "Terror") Robinson, of Arkansas, and the relationship between this Administration leader and the frustration of all attempts to alleviate the plight of white and Negro sharecroppers in the cotton South. In this or similar handbooks for speakers, the G. O. P. will attempt to capitalize on the fact that the AAA's cotton program has pushed the southern Negro deeper into a slavery worse than that from which the Republican Party claims to have freed him in 1862. The Republicans also will seek to make Negro votes out of Roosevelt's silence on racial and civil-liberties issues as well as out of his Administration's failure to use its overwhelming majorities in House and Senate to force through an anti-lynching bill. They may also call attention to the refusal of the Department of Justice to send its G-men after lynchers who have kidnapped Negroes and carried them across state lines, as in the Claude Neal case, even after the Lindbergh law had been amended to make such federal action possible. And if the Republicans do seek to make that point against the Administration, which argued that there was no ransom involved in the Neal case, they can bulwark it by pointing out that there was no hesitancy in sending G-men into the Wendel case, though it also was uncomplicated by ransom demands.

Telling though such thrusts and arguments may be, how can they possibly prevail against the counter-evidence supplied by the Democrats in convention at Philadelphia? How can they possibly outweigh the spectacle put on there by Senator "Cotton Ed" Smith, of South Carolina, thunderously bolting the convention because of its courtesies to Negroes? Smith's blustering advertised to millions of Negro voters that one of their race, the Reverend

Marshall Shepard, trusted political lieutenant of Pennsylvania's Governor Earle, had been invited to pray over the convention, that another Negro, Congressman Mitchell, had been allowed to second Roosevelt's nomination.

Coupled with the Smith incident as a vote-maker for Roosevelt is the performance of the Roosevelt-hater, Governor Talmadge, of Georgia, and his allies who with obvious defamatory intent circulated photographs of Mrs. Roosevelt in the company of Negroes. Then there is the case of Mrs. Roosevelt herself who, appalled by conditions at the National Industrial Training School for Girls, recently gave the inmates an outing on the White House lawn and by so doing provided the South Carolina Democratic convention a few weeks later with its chief topic of conversation. Speakers down from Washington were warned by friends on the scene to make no laudatory references to the President's wife; she had just entertained a bunch of "nigger whores" at the White House.

Not the least among the Democrats' assets is the Committee for Industrial Organization, parent to Labor's Non-Partisan League, which is out to line up the labor vote for Roosevelt. The unions which are the backbone of the C. I. O.—the United Mine Workers and the needle-trades groups—are preeminently the unions which draw no color line. There are about 100,000 Negroes in the C. I. O. unions. The U. M. W. alone has about 22,000 of them and by its example in Alabama has broken down the color line that for many years has been impeding unionization in the South. The C. I. O. in its steel, rubber, and automobile drives, has the active support of the National Negro Congress, headed by A. Philip Randolph, president of the Sleeping Car Porters. John P. Davis, national secretary of the congress, who was the pay-off man in the Negro division of the Hoover campaign in 1932, is taking an active part in the steel drive and has recruited for the C. I. O. eight Negro organizers.

And that brings us to the Democrats' chief asset in the campaign—the WPA. If there is anything at the Administration's command that will outweigh the cash the Landon forces are prepared to lay out for the Negro vote, it is the WPA. Unemployment has hit the Negro harder than any other group, and the WPA has given him work. Moreover, it has given him work on terms of equality with the white man. The opportunities for racial discrimination which the FERA offered and local relief machinery still offers have been virtually erased by the WPA's rules and regulations. Despite its flaws and its low standards of relief, the FERA provided thousands of Negroes with more security and a better standard of living than they had ever known before. The fact that this was due chiefly to the abominably low level of their previous existence does not alter the psychological effect. Nor does it detract materially from the fact that the WPA, while throwing back thousands of Negro families to their previous levels, has raised other thousands above the FERA level to a plane heretofore inaccessible to the colored masses. The FERA, it is generally conceded, was responsible for the Democratic gains among Negroes in the 1934 elections. Roosevelt and his aides count upon the WPA to double and treble those gains in 1936.

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