

Toward Freedom

DEAR Mr. Littell:

I want to explain why you were booed and hissed at the Negro Freedom Rally at Madison Square Garden last Monday. There are lessons in that experience which you and many other white speakers before Negro audiences need quickly to learn.

First, you were booed and hissed because of your own prejudice against the Negro people. You are prejudiced, Mr. Littell. Otherwise, when facing that magnificent audience at a Negro Freedom Rally, you would have spoken out against the travesties in democracy which anti-Negro discriminations represent. Instead, you tried to placate an aroused people with the sophistry that everybody—even yourself!—suffers from some discriminations.

Did you observe the hearty ovations given to Rabbi Stephen Wise, Representative Vito Marcantonio and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia? They are militant fighters against racial discrimination, not mere philosophical observers of such injustices. They made clear their firm alliance with the Negro's wartime struggles for greater freedom. This you failed to do, because you do not feel that way.

I do not accuse you of vicious and militant prejudice. Yours is but a comfortable, stuffed-shirt contentment with things as they are.



But despite the pro-Negro gesture you had to make, and did, that mature audience of 25,000 progressive Negro and white Americans sensed from the beginning your basic insincerity.

Remember this: Whoever opposes or fails vigorously to champion the cause of Negro freedom can now exercise no influence over the Negro people.

SECOND, you were booed and hissed because you presumed to tell an audience with deeper political understanding than your own that the Negro should forget his discriminations in the larger interests of the war. This was your major blunder, and doubtless grows out of your own political shallowness.

There was no lack of sincere win-the-war sentiment in that audience. How proudly they acclaimed their heroes from the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the U. S. Merchant Marine! How graciously they honored the two recipients of "Miss Negro War Worker" awards! With what enthusiasm they applauded every speaker's call for all-out support of the war effort!

That audience had even greater win-the-war fervor than you. They also had something which you lacked completely—a clear understanding that anti-Negro discriminations, both in civilian and military life, are a serious threat to national unity and a major obstacle to victory. They understood that the whole rotten system of jimcrow

An Open Letter to Ass't Atty.-Gen. Littell

must be uprooted—NOW, precisely because of the urgent necessity to destroy fascism and build an enduring peace.

FOR a Negro leader or a sincere friend of the Negro to recite the wartime gains of the Negro people would have been entirely acceptable. He would then have gone on to call for even more vigorous struggle to hasten this progressive trend. But you listed these gains with the more or less explicit suggestion that Negroes should now be willing to keep quiet about the still remaining discriminations and devote their energies to winning the war—as if the two were separate movements. That was your fatal error. Remember this: Whoever is thoroughly and sincerely devoted to the paramount aims of victory and a just peace will now struggle to remove the jimcrow obstacles to their attainment.

At first I flinched when you were booed and hissed, because you were supposed to be a representative of the Administration. . . . Upon reflection, however, I realized that you were but an innocuous representative of the equally inept Attorney General who is your Chief. The genuine enthusiasm with which that audience greeted every reference to the slogan, "Victory with FDR in 1944," convinced me that you had done no harm to our great Commander-in-Chief.

I now think it was wholesome for you to be hissed and booed. It may teach you and many like you some important lessons.