

# Rights of the Negro —by Southerner

Senator says: 'I am humbled'

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It begins to appear that when everyone has had his say before the Senate Commerce Committee, which tomorrow begins its third week of hearings on the President's Civil Rights Bill, the complete transcript of the testimony will constitute a classic State paper covering the spectrum of American opinion in mid-century on the status of the Negro in American life.

The task of weighing the pros and cons fell to the Commerce Committee because the legal loophole through

which the administration hopes to drive a Federal law is that section of the Constitution which gives to Congress the power "to regulate commerce . . . among the several States."

The Administration hopes to make it a Federal offence to refuse to serve or to seat or to accommodate anyone who enters a store, a restaurant, a theatre, or an hotel that gets its food, its furnishings, or any other service through inter-State commerce. Hence the last-ditch resistance of most of the Southern witnesses on the grounds that such a law would abolish or unconstitutionally restrict the right to private property.

Since the hearings started, the committee has heard from such witnesses as the Rev. Martin Luther King, Attorney-General Robert Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the indignant Governor Wallace of Alabama ("Is not the real purpose to disarm this country as the Communists have planned?"), and the learned Senator Sam Ervine, of North Carolina, the famous constitutional lawyer who calls the Civil Rights Bill "as drastic and indefensible a proposal as has ever been submitted to this Congress."

## Most remarkable

Of all the witnesses so far, however, the most remarkable, and the most characteristic of the South's agonising second thoughts, was the last one to appear this weekend: Mr Ivan Allen, jun., the nationally known Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, which has, in the last year or two, slowly and with much dissension, managed to desegregate its parks and golf courses, its restaurants, lunch counters, theatres, public schools, and hotels.

Mr Allen's testimony needs no gloss. It was a long statement delivered without bombast, and without much self-esteem either. Here are some of the most typical passages, delivered in a soft, almost apologetic Southern accent:

"It is true that Atlanta has achieved success in eliminating discrimination in areas where some other cities have failed, but we do not boast of our success . . . we have achieved it only because we looked facts in the face and

accepted the Supreme Court's decisions as inevitable and as the law of our land. . . .

"It has been a long, exhausting, and often discouraging process, and the end is far from being in sight. . . . Step by step, sometimes under court order, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes adroitly, and many times clumsily, we have tried to find a solution to each specific problem through an agreement between the affected white ownership and the Negro leadership.

## 'Take action'

"Gentlemen, if I had your problem, armed with the local experience I have had, I would pass a public accommodation bill.

"Now is the time for legislative action. We cannot dodge the issue. We cannot look back over our shoulders or turn the clock back to the 1860s. We must take action now to assure a greater future for our citizens and our country.

"A hundred years ago the abolition of slavery won the US the acclaim of the whole world when it made every American free in theory. Now, the elimination of segregation, which is slavery's stepchild, is a challenge to all of us to make every American free in fact . . . and again to establish our nation as a true champion of the free world."

When he had done, Senator Thurmond of South Carolina, the old Dixiecrat, leaped in, challenging the Mayor to deny that the rulings of the Supreme Court, if incorporated in the bill, would mean "compulsion." The Mayor replied: "It would compel the same rights to be given the Negro citizen as the white citizen. Yes, that's compulsion. Any Federal law exercises some compulsion."

A Democrat of Michigan jumped in to ask the Mayor if he didn't think Atlanta's desegregation programme was "Communist inspired," a favourite point of Senator Thurmond. "Senator," said the Mayor, "there are no more Communists in Atlanta than there are on the moon."

At the end, the chairman, Senator John Pastore, Democrat of Rhode Island, said he appreciated that it had been harder for Mayor Allen to say what he had said than it would have been for mayors of some Northern cities. "Mr Mayor," said Senator Pastore, "I am humbled in your presence."