

Civil Rights and Soundness

Leonard J. Kerpelman, a longtime courtroom champion of civil rights, may represent no trend in his opposition now to any further extension of civil rights to Negroes. His action could focus the fact that the "trend" in civil rights needs clearer, more widespread understanding.

Mr. Kerpelman is a Baltimore lawyer who lives in a racially integrated neighborhood; is satisfied still to send his children to an integrated school. He is a long-time member of the NAACP and has campaigned for able Negro candidates for local office. He is disturbed now over the willingness of some Baltimore Negro leaders to threaten a "Watts riot" there as a lever to bring about more racial advance. That, of course, goes beyond demonstrations, which civil rights leaders control, to violent mob action in which destructiveness and even killing is turned loose for police to control.

The "trend" in the civil rights movement is often misunderstood, primarily because it has so often been misstated.

The defiant segregationists call all demonstrations "mobs," when, in fact, demonstrations led by such men as Martin Luther King, have never included rock and bottle throwing and property destruction which is what makes a demonstration a "mob." Yet some of the Rev. Mr. King's field workers—even here in North Carolina—have been observed openly playing loose with the truth in trying to whip up militance and emotional ill will. They have at times gone beyond the truth of the racial unfairness which exists, creating passions which only racial advantage, not racial fairness, would be required to redress.

The "trend" in civil rights can be what anybody can persuade a significant number of people to believe. Mr. Kerpelman has done his share of the persuading, and no doubt intends to continue. But he demonstrates that in his city he means to remain on sound ground even if for a while the civil rights movement there doesn't. He sets a good example for everyone in any community.