

Civil Rights Proposal Shakes American System

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WE ARE in accord with the views of Sen. Richard B. Russell on the Kennedy administration's new civil rights and the racial situation in general.

Among other things, the distinguished Georgia lawmaker said "no American citizen has the right to select the laws he will obey and those he will disobey."

Referring to the wave of racial demonstrations in recent weeks, he said the American system has always rejected the idea that one group of citizens may deprive another of legal rights in property by process of agitation, demonstration, intimidation, law defiance and civil disobedience.

The civil rights proposals sent to Congress by the President contain a section that should be repugnant to all Americans, regardless of race.

This public accommodations proposal would enable the federal government to enforce desegregation of private establishments catering to the general public.

It seems to Sen. Russell, to many other members of Congress and to us that this is itself a move to deprive Americans of property rights.

Court decisions have laid down a clear line on the use of public facilities supported by tax refunds and those directly related to interstate commerce such as transportation facilities.

But the move to dictate to the owner of a store or restaurant whom he may or may not serve is a more crucial point. Should this right of property owners be taken away, it would represent the fall of one of the last great bulwarks of the American initiative and free enterprise system. . . .

Negro Voting Bill Offers Upheaval

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WASHINGTON — While the heat and thunder across the South is being concentrated on the public accommodations section of President John F. Kennedy's civil rights bill, a recent study of Negro voting and population has indicated that another civil rights measure might have a far-reaching political effect.

The public accommodations section of the Kennedy bill (Title II) is the one that would outlaw racial discrimination in such businesses as hotels and restaurants. Hearings are being held on that measure now by two committees of Congress.

Last week Sen. Richard B. Russell of Winder told a Jasper audience that such a bill "levels an all but mortal blow at the right of a man who owns property to decide how the property shall be used."

CALLED SOCIALISTIC

Earlier the Georgia senator and leader of the Southern group in the Senate had called Title II "socialistic and communistic."

However, more and more interest is being shown in Washington about another civil rights proposal. That is the voting rights section of the bill the President sent to Congress in April, before the Negro demonstrations around the country had reached the fever pitch of today.

Part of that bill would allow the federal government to go into counties where fewer than 15 per cent of the adult Negroes were registered to vote and put them on voting rolls.

COULD GET ORDER

Here is how it would work: In Miller County, Georgia, no Negroes are registered to vote. The Justice department would file a suit charging that there is a "pattern of discrimination." If a federal district court agreed, then any Negro in that county could get an order declaring that he was entitled to vote, if the judge found that he was qualified under state law and that he had been denied the opportunity to register.

The county officials or the state could contest this order, but meanwhile Negroes would be allowed to register and vote. The court could register them or it could appoint federal referees. If an election came along before the case had finally been settled, the Negro votes would be impounded until there was a decision.

261 COUNTIES INVOLVED

A somewhat similar provision was written into law in 1960. The important difference was this: Negroes could not register or vote until after the case had been decided.

According to a study just completed by a non-government organization, there are 261 counties in the South in which less than 15 per cent of the adult Negroes are registered to vote.

Thirty-six of those counties are in Georgia, mostly in south Georgia. If federal referees were to be allowed to register Negroes to vote in all those counties, it could very well have a decided impact at the polls on local races though probably not in congressional races, with two possible exceptions.

The exceptions are the Second District (southwest Georgia) represented in Congress by J. L. Pilecher of Meigs and the Third (southwest central) represented by E. L. (Tic) Forrester of Leesburg.

WHERE THEY'RE FEW

The Second District has 14 counties. In half of them less than 15 per cent of the Negroes are registered to vote. The Third District has 24 counties. In 14 of them less than 15 per cent of the Negroes are registered to vote.

In Georgia's other districts, the situation is this: First—In only three of 18 counties are less than 15 per cent of the adult Negroes registered. Fourth—two of 15 counties. Sixth—four of 16. Eighth—two of 20. Tenth—four of 17.

In Atlanta (Fifth District) and the two north Georgia Districts (Seventh and Ninth) there are no counties in which less than 15 per cent of the Negroes are registered.

The Georgia situation compares favorably to several other Southern states. In Alabama there are less than 15 per cent of the Negroes registered to vote in half

of the state's counties. In Louisiana the "pattern" is seen in over a third of the counties. In Mississippi 76 of the 82 counties have registered less than 15 per cent of the adult Negroes. In South Carolina less than 15 per cent are registered in over half of the counties.

Those 36 counties in Georgia represent less than one fourth of the state's 159.

If Negroes were suddenly registered to vote in relatively large numbers in counties and congressional districts where they had not participated before, what would the result be?

TO LIBERALIZE POLITICOS?

Some Southern politicians think it would be to "liberalize the politicians from many of the areas—in economic matters if not in civil rights matters. The reasoning behind this seems to be that most of the Negroes thus registered would be those who are interested in minimum wage legislation, welfare programs and the like.

Their votes, together with whites similarly interested, would be a power in congressional districts and probably to a greater extent, statewide.

It is unlikely, according to several Georgians in Congress, that these Negroes would have the numerical strength to insist on congressmen who would vote for or champion civil rights laws.

IN MISSISSIPPI

If the result in Georgia would be most heavily felt in only two districts, contrast that with Mississippi: in four of the five districts every county has registered less than 15 per cent of the adult Negroes. In the other district, less than 15 per cent of the Negroes are registered to vote in 10 of the 16 counties.

A majority of the counties would be affected by the new law in all but one South Carolina congressional district. Most of the counties in two of Louisiana's eight districts would be affected.

One Georgia congressman believes that the impact of registering Negroes would be less than expected. He says that most of the counties where the abuses have occurred are rural and that a majority of the Negroes in such counties would not be qualified to vote even if the registrars were fair. This is because of low education standards, he says.

IN URBAN AREAS

But he, too, concedes that congressmen would have to take the wishes of the newly registered Negroes into account. He thinks the state's two senators would be more likely to feel "pressure" from any drive to register Negroes.

His reasoning here was that there is already a substantial Negro vote in urban areas in the state. That plus "a little here and a little there" from elsewhere in the state would, he says, "add up to a real force in statewide elections."

Another congressman sees the most important result of a new voting law as being its contribution to the early death of whatever two-party system may be developing in the South. He points out that Negroes are going to vote Democratic more and more in the South because they are mostly in the lowest economic level and the Republican appeal to the poor is very slim.

The only reason that Negroes voted Republican in the South in the past is that the "aura of Lincoln" according to this congressman, lingers on. That is being replaced, he says by the "aura of Bobby and Jack."