

# Civil Right No.1—

By MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

**F**EW people in America realize the seriousness of the burden imposed upon our democracy by the disfranchisement of Negroes in the Deep South. In Mississippi only about 26,000 out of a voting-age population of some 450,000 Negroes have been allowed to register. The situation in Alabama and Louisiana is almost as bad, though previous state administrations of a more liberal inclination did permit the registration of approximately 150,000 Negro voters in Louisiana and 111,000 in Alabama. In recent years, however, under Wallace in Alabama and former Gov. Jimmy Davis of Louisiana, the plan has been to freeze Negro registration at a level which can be successfully negated by sure segregationist voting strength.

This has led to a crisis not only for the Negro in the South but for Negroes in the swollen ghettos of the North. Northern cities are inheriting the results of Northern indifference to Southern racism and exploitation as the victims of oppression migrate there in search of freedom. If they had had the ballot, Negroes might have had a chance to lead a decent life in their Southern homelands, where many owned small plots of land and participated in a stable pattern of community life that at least promised survival and a minimum of emotional security. This is more than is promised by the slums of New York, Chicago and other cities, which are already teeming with bitterness and



The author, shown speaking to supporters, declares: "The Supreme Court's 'one man, one vote' must be followed by 'a vote for every man.'"

constantly kept at boiling point by the misery of rats, filth, unemployment and *de facto* segregation.

But the evils of disfranchisement burden our cities in other ways as well as by mass migration. Southern seniority in Congress, resting as it does on the "whites only" ballot box, maintains power in the hands of our nation's most reactionary politicians. Bills providing for the welfare of our nation, from Medicare to education, must run the gantlet of Southern power before they are enacted—and many never are.

**V**OTING as a badge of full citizenship has always had a special meaning to the Negro, but in 1963 the denial of the right to vote cuts painfully and deeply into his new sense of personal dignity. It is salt on his wounded pride. For today he looks beyond the borders of his own land and sees the decolonization and liberation of Africa and Asia; he sees colored peoples, yellow, black and brown, ruling over their own new nations. He sees colored statesmen voting on vital issues of war and peace at the United Nations at a time when he is not even permitted to vote for the office of sheriff in his local county.

In 1964, however, the Negro voter participated as a significant partner in a ballot landslide that repudiated a Republican party which had allowed itself to be captured by racism and reaction. He was the key to the Dem-

ocratic victory in several Southern states, and he thereby proved that voting is more than a badge of citizenship and dignity—it is an effective tool for change.

Voting is the foundation stone for political action. With it the Negro can eventually vote out of office public officials who bar the doorway to decent housing, public safety, jobs and decent integrated education. It is now obvious that the basic elements so vital to Negro advancement can only be achieved by seeking redress from government at local, state and Federal levels. To do this the vote is essential.

When the full power of the ballot is available to my people it will not be exercised merely to advance our cause alone. We have learned in the course of our struggle to recognize that the needs of 20 million Negroes are not truly separable from those of the nearly 200 million whites and Negroes in America, all of whom will benefit from a color-blind land of plenty that provides for the nourishment of each man's body, mind and spirit. Our vote would place in Congress true representatives of the people who would legislate for the Medicare, housing, schools and jobs required by all men of any color.

**I**N Selma, Ala., thousands of Negroes are courageously providing dramatic witness to the evil forces that bar our way to the all-important ballot box. They are laying bare for all the nation to see, for all the world to know, the nature of segregationist resistance. The ugly pattern of denial flourishes with insignificant differences in thousands of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and other Southern communities. Once it is exposed, and challenged by the marching feet of Negro citizens, the nation will take action to cure this cancerous sore. What is malignant in Selma must be removed by Congressional surgery so that all citizens may freely exercise their right to vote without delays, harassment, economic intimidation and police brutality. Selma is to 1965 what Birmingham was to 1963.



Selma, Ala., Negroes sign a list entitling them to apply to register on one of two days a month. "The key to Southern tactics is delay."



Teen-agers demonstrate against Sheriff James Clark in Selma.

# The Right to Vote



Dr. King's head, right foreground, is knocked against the counter of the Hotel Albert in Selma by a white assailant. "Fear is the main barrier to voting—and the fear is real, as broken bodies bear witness."

The pattern of denial depends upon four main roadblocks. First, there is the Gestapo-like control of county and local government in the South by the likes of Sheriff Jim Clark of Selma, Ala., and Sheriff Rainey of Philadelphia, Miss. There is a carefully cultivated mystique behind the power and brutality of these men. The gun, the club and the cattle prod reinforce the fear that is the main barrier to voting—a barrier erected by 345 years' exposure to the psychology and brutality of slavery and legal segregation. It is a fear rooted in feelings of inferiority.

But the fear is also real, as the broken bodies and bloody heads of citizens in Selma and Marion bear witness. And the snakes placed on people standing in line were not hallucinations, as hundreds, including the press, can testify. Nor was it a sick imagination that conjured up the vision of a public official, sworn to uphold the law, who forced an inhuman march upon hundreds of Negro children; who ordered the Rev. James Bevel to be chained to his stockbed; who clubbed a Negro woman registrant, and who callously inflicted repeated brutalities and indignities upon nonviolent Negroes peacefully petitioning for their constitutional right to vote.

Would a fiction writer have the temerity to invent a character wearing a sheriff's badge at the head of a helmeted posse who punched a clergy-

man in the mouth and then proudly boasted: "If I hit him, I don't know it. One of the first things I ever learned was not to hit a nigger with your fist because his head is too hard. Of course, the camera might make me out to be a liar. I do have a sore finger"?

Yet such a man actually exists in Sheriff Clark. He was voted into office in Dallas County by an electorate that includes only 335 out of 15,000 Negroes of voting age. In contrast, out of 14,440 whites of voting age, 9,543 have been registered. So far, 3,400 Negroes have been arrested in Selma, placing 10 times as many in Selma jails as are on the voters' roll.

**T**HE second factor in the pattern of Negro disfranchisement is the abuse of local and state laws to impede the exercise of suffrage rights. Southern officials, knowing they cannot jail citizens for seeking the right to vote, instead claim that Negroes are guilty of other "offenses." In Selma, for instance, more than 3,000 arrests have been made on such charges as "breach of peace," "contempt of court," "disorderly conduct," "unlawful assembly," "contributing to the delinquency of minors" and "criminal provocation."

Aside from the obvious intimidation involved in arrest and jail, 3,000 Negro citizens now face years of expensive and frustrating litigation

before these "charges" are defeated and their right to vote vindicated.

After so many years of intimidation, the Negro community has learned that its salvation lies in united action. When one Negro stands up, he is run out of town. But when a thousand stand up together the situation is drastically altered. Abuse of the law by local police power is expressly designed to frustrate such united action, and so long as these mass arrests are made on trumped-up "charges" the path to the registrar's office is obstructed.

**T**HE third factor in shielding Negro voting rights is the registrar himself, administering complex registration procedures designed specifically to slow up and frustrate Negro applicants. As Burke Marshall, former Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights Division, has pointed out:

"The Negro voting problem . . . is more than a legal issue. For it takes courage, patience and massive effort before a significant number of Negro residents are ready to break the pattern of their lives by attempting to register to vote, and when the effort is unsuccessful because of discrimination, delay, intimidation or of the failure of Negro applicants themselves, the promised Federal rights again become illusory."

Where the will to keep Negro registration to a minimum is strong, Mr. Marshall said, "the latitude for dis-



Steel-helmeted deputies patrol a voter-registration rally.



"The vote is essential. The way to it is through Federal registers."

crimination is almost endless. The onerous practices that can be used are virtually infinite."

Using them, the white hierarchy of Selma has succeeded in limiting Negro registration to the snail's pace of about 145 persons a year. At this rate it would take about 103 years to register the 15,000 eligible Negro voters of Dallas County—not counting those who will reach voting age in that period or who may move into the county. A weapon for delay is the decision to open the registration office on only two days per month. Long lines of Negroes have waited without success, merely to enter the office to apply for registration.

After 13 private and Government lawsuits were instituted, however, minimal corrective measures were ordered by Judge Daniel H. Thomas of the Federal District Court of Mobile. Although he found a "pattern of discrimination," he refused to order the registrar's office to open more frequently. Instead, he set up a new procedure containing many of the same seeds of discouragement and frustration. Negroes seeking to register may "sign up" on a public "appearance sheet," and a Federal voting referee has now been appointed to process the applications. In the meantime every Negro who has signed the appearance sheet must be ready to endure an ordeal by economic retaliation and personal intimidation perfected by racists over many decades.

It is a shining tribute to Negro determination therefore that despite this harassment, including being made to wait in the pouring rain, 266 persons—most of them Negroes—completed their registration applications in Selma on March 1, an all-time record for the county.

But it must also be said that the concept of a Federal referee appointed by the court looks good only on the surface. (Continued on Page 94)





(Continued from Preceding Page)  
 ferior segregated education now require "literacy" as a prerequisite for voting. You hardly need much formal training to know who as sheriff will treat you like a human being and who will crack your skull!

The deliberate nature of our legal process is being abused. Legal redress for Negroes entails expensive court actions whose victories are the signal not for the capitulation of segregationists but rather for further bouts with new delaying tactics. Even the recent action of the Attorney General in Alabama to strike at statewide measures, while welcome, cannot bring redress here and now. The delays inherent in test cases, where the U.S. Supreme Court must ultimately rule, make sadly pertinent the comment of Chief Justice Earl Warren in the school desegregation cases: "Justice delayed is justice denied."

**C**LEARLY, the heart of the voting problem lies in the fact that the machinery for enforcing this basic right is in the hands of state-appointed officials answerable to the very people who believe they can continue to wield power in the South only so long as the Negro is disfranchised. No matter how many loopholes are plugged, no matter how many irregularities are exposed, it is plain that the Federal Government must withdraw this control from the states or else set up machinery for policing it effectively.

The patchwork reforms brought about by the laws of 1957, 1960 and 1964 have helped, but the denial of suffrage has gone on too long, has caused too deep a hurt for Negroes to wait out the time required by slow, piecemeal enforcement procedures. What is needed is the new voting-rights legislation promised for this session of Congress.

As I told our people in Dallas County two weeks ago, "We are going to bring a voting bill into being in the streets of Selma. President Johnson has a mandate from the American people. He must go out and get a voting bill this time that will end the necessity for any more voting bills."

Certainly, no community in the history of the Negro struggle has responded with the enthusiasm of Selma and her neighboring town of Marion, Ala. Where Birmingham depended largely upon students and unemployed adults, Selma has involved fully 40 per cent of the Negro population in active demonstrations, and it least half the Negro population of Marion was arrested on one day.

Seldom has there been so complete a representation of every facet of community life. Teachers and students, clergy and laity—all joined the long march of freedom. This is significant because it means that,

once the demonstrations are over, a united political organization will be left in being to direct the drive for votes and other rights. This could well be the pattern of the future, for it is plain that the 1964 Civil Rights Act has given new confidence to the nonviolent movement.

**B**UT it is also clear that the voting sections of the existing act are inadequate, as I have stressed in my recent meetings with President Johnson. I urge Congress to enact a voting-rights bill including these basic principles:

(1) Registration machinery so automatic that it eliminates varying standards and undue discretion on the part of hostile state registrars, and requires only elementary biographical details from applicants. This was recommended by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission after it completed its studies in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

(2) The abolition of literacy tests in those areas where Negroes have been disadvantaged by generations of inferior, segregated education.

(3) Application of the law to all elections, Federal and state, and especially to local elections for sheriff, school boards, etc.

(4) Enforcement of the law by Federal registrars appointed by and responsible to the President.

(5) Such legislation, while directed against oppressive areas like Selma, must be versatile enough to overcome more sophisticated resistance in cities like New Orleans, Chicago, New York or Miami.

**O**NE of the difficult lessons we have learned is that you cannot depend upon American institutions to function without pressure. Any real change in the status quo depends on continued creative action to sharpen the conscience of the nation and establish a climate in which even the most recalcitrant elements are forced to admit that change is necessary.

To this end, we are committed to keep up the pressure for the adoption of a Civil Rights Act of 1965. We know that Americans of goodwill have learned that no nation can long continue to flourish or to find its way to a better society while it allows any one of its citizens, let alone vast numbers in 11 Southern states, to be denied the right to participate in the most fundamental of all privileges of democracy—the right to vote.

At a time when the Supreme Court has said that the law of the land demands "one man, one vote," so that all state legislatures may be democratically structured, it would be a mockery indeed if this were not followed without delay by an insistence upon "one vote for every man."



Are you going  
 to Europe to share a bathroom  
 with six other guys?

"Down with roughing it!" says Vacation-Time Tours. Stay at Europe's good hotels. Eat Europe's fine food. Do it right. Vacation-Time Tours lets you live it up for only \$495 for fifteen days, \$595 for twenty-one days. That includes transatlantic jet, hotel accommodations, all transportation, sightseeing, and more—even a solicitous Tour Director. Select from 26 departures from April through November. How can we do it? Mail coupon for full details.

**VACATION-TIME TOURS\***  
 555 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N.Y.  
 Phone: MU 8-910

Please send me free illustrated brochure describing six itineraries offered in your program of European tours, at \$495 for 15 days and \$595 for 21 days.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip # \_\_\_\_\_

Offered exclusively by **AMERICAN GRAND CIRCLE, INC.**  
 Division of Grand Circle Travel, Inc.

\* Service Mark

are you a  
**unitarian  
 universalist**  
 without knowing it?

- Do you believe that no one has the right to do your thinking for you?
- Do you believe that "religious truth" cannot be contrary to truth from other sources?
- Do you believe man is capable of self-improvement and is not condemned by "original sin"?
- Do you believe that practicing brotherhood is more important than practicing creed?
- Do you believe in being actively concerned with community, national and world problems?
- Do you see as professed Unitarian Universalist beliefs—and need not "believe alone," but for those who choose to practice Unitarian Universalism.

Mail this coupon with 25¢ to  
 LEFFRON'S LEAGUE (Unitarian Universalist)  
 Dept. 125, 25 Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02108

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_



**Now! False Teeth  
 Fit Beautifully!**

Amazing dental discovery, Cushion Grip®—ends sore spots—refits loose dentures to hold snug as a dentist's mold! One application lasts weeks! Nothing to mix! Economical!

After years of research, modern science has developed a remarkable new way to make false teeth fit beautifully—stop looseness, slipping, clicking, relieve sore spots—without messy, old-fashioned pastes, powders and pads! It's Cushion Grip—amazing new soft, pliable plastic that holds false teeth snug as a dentist's mold, through soothing suction—makes loose dentures fit properly again. Result is, you can talk, laugh, eat anything without discomfort or embarrassment!

of tube onto dentures, then insert false teeth into mouth and bite down. Instantly, Cushion Grip molds to contours of mouth and gums—provides beautiful fit—holds dentures firmly in place with suction. Looseness, slipping, clicking, disappear. Sore spots are quickly relieved. One application lasts for weeks, despite nightly cleaning, yet Cushion Grip is easily removed when desired. What's more, Cushion Grip actually refits, relines worn dentures, lets you save over \$100 on costly relining work. Get new Cushion Grip today. Satisfaction guaranteed or money back.

Cushion Grip is easy to use—nothing to mix or measure! Simply squeeze out.

A product of Pharmacia, Inc., Kenilworth, New Jersey