# Civil Right No.1-

By MARTIN LUTHER KING J.

EW people in America realize the seriousness of the burden imposed upon our democracy by the disfranchisement of Negroes n the Deep South. In Mississippi ony about 26,000 out of a voting-age posulation of some 450,000 Negroes have been allowed to register. The situstion in Alabama and Louisiana s almost as bad, though previous stale administrations of a more liberal isclination did permit the registration of approximately 150,000 Negro voers in Louisiana and 111,000 in Alibama. 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 atrength.

This has lad to a crisis not only the Negro in the South but for No groes in the swallen ghettoes of the North. Northern cities are inheriting the results of Northern indifference to Southern racism and exploitation as the victims of oppression migrale 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 emtional security. This is more than s promised by the slums of New York, Chicago and other cities, which are already teeming with bitterness and



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."



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.

VOTING as a badge of full citizenship has always had a special meaning to the Negro, but in 1965 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 pecu the decolonisation 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 Democratic 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 dfice public officials who bar the dooway to decent housing, public safely, jobs and decent integrated education. It is now obvious that the basic dements so vital to Negro advancement can only be achieved by seeking reless from government at local, stale and Federal levels. To do this he 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 OH DE UKKER LINKS the needs of 20 million Jegroes are not truly separable from hose 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 spirt. 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.

N Selma, Ala., thousands of Ne. groes are courageously previding dramatic witness to the evil forces that bar our way to the all-important ballot box. They are laying sare for all the nation to see, for al the world to know, the nature of segregationist resistance. The ugly patern 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 Selna must be removed by Congressional surgery so that all citizens may fredy exercise their right to vote without delays, harassment, economic intimidation and police brutality. Selma is to 1965 what Birmingham was to 1963.



Teen-agers demonstrate against Sheriff James Clerk in Selma.

# The Right to Vote



Dr. King's head, sight foreground, is knocked against the counter of the Hotel Albert in Selma by a white assailant. "Fear is the main bastler 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 Seims, Als., and Sheriff Rainey of Philadelphia, Miss. There is a carefully cultivated supstique 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 poychology 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 hal-lucinations, as bundreds, 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 sickbed; who clubbed a Negro woman regis. trant, and who callously inflicted repeated brutalities and indignities upon nonviolent Negroes peacefully petitioning for their constitutional right

Would a fiction writer have the temerity to invent a character wearing a sheriff's badge at the head of a selmeted posse who punched a clergyman in the mouth and then proudly boasted: "If I hit him, I ont't know it. One of the first things I ever learned was not to hit a ngger with your fist because his head i too hard. Of course, the camera mght 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 Negrous of voting age. It contrast, out of 14,440 whites of voting age, 5,543 have been registered. So far, 3,400 Negroes have been irrested in Selma, placing 10 times at many in Selma, placing 10 times at many in Selma, placing are on the voters' roll.

THE second factor in the pattern of Negro disfranchisement is the abuse of local and state love to impede the exercise of suffrage rights. Southern officials, knowing they cannot jail citizens for section the right to vote, instead claim that Negroes are guilty of other "offesses." In Selma, for instance, more han 3 000 arrests have been made on such charges as "breach of peace," "contempt of court." "disorderly canduct." "unlawful assembly," "contributing to the delinquency of misora" and "oriminal provocation."

Aside from the obvious intimidation involved in arrest and nil, 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.

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 voterregistration rally.



"The vote is emeitial. he way to it is through Federal registres."

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

Using them, the write 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 163 years to register the 15,00 eligible Negro voters of Dallas County—not counting those who will mach 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 Negrees have waited without success mently to enter the office, to apply for registration.

After 13 private and Government lawsuits were instituted, however, minimal corrective measures were ordered by Judge Duriel H. Thomas of the Federal District Court of Mobile. Although he found a "pattern of discrimination," herefused to order the registrar's office to open more frequently. Instead, he set up a new procedure containing many of the same seeds of discuragement and frustration. Negroes weking to register may "sign up" on a public "ap-pearance sheet," and s Federal voting referce has now been appointed to time every Negro who has signed the appearance sheet must be ready to endure an ordeal by conomic retaliation and personal istimidation perfected by racists over many decades.

It is a shining tribite to Negro determination therefore that despite this harassment, including being made to wait in the jouring rain, 266 persons—roost of tiem Negroes completed their registration applications in Selma on Narch 1, an alltime record for the sounty.

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)

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#### Civil Right Number One

(Continued from Page 27) We happen to know something, for instance, about the referee appointed for adjacent Perry unty. He has just about as discriminatory a record as the county-appointed registrar and we are already contesting his pattern of misconduct. He is a native of Greene County, which is also in the "black belt" and has as bitter a heritage of segregation as Perry and Dallas

Counties, with even fewer Negross registered. Moreover, the appointment

tactics.

of a voting referee provides no assurance of speedy processing for the thousands of applications that will flood his office. The Act of 1960 that permitted the courts to appoint referees allows for a legal chalby the referee and thus offers ample opportunities for delay,

which is the key to Southern

Delays feed the dangers that beset Negroes. Every day means more murder and brutality, more suffering from inferior education, more dreary hours in the long night of ecoomic exploitation and more of the deadly despair brought on by personal humiliation.

The whole program of delay can be appreciated if one recognizes that the white community is almost 100 per cent registered and eligible to vote whereas Negro voters are added almost one by one to the voters' roll. If it takes a century more to redeem the 15th Amendment's promise, the white Southern official could not care less.

HE fourth roadblock on way to Negro suffrage is the literacy test, administered by the registrars and designed to be difficult. The Justice Department has been able to establish in hundreds of counties that these tests are not administered fairly. There are many instances of "fair-skinned" Negroes and white persons being helped to register, while in Selma ministers and teachers have been rejected six and seven times. (An interesting sidelight on this is that Selma's deputy registrar handed out 20 or more vouchers for prospective voters on which the word was spelt "vocher.") Although a Federal court has now ordered Selma to scrap a most technical and difficult literacy test, the order applies only to Selma, so that the logal tattle will have to be waged county by county. Again, time is the enemy operating on the side of the "white only" ballot box.

It is surely ironical that the states which have labored so diligently to keep the Negro masses ignorant through in-(Continued on Following Page)

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

The deliberate nature of our legal process is being abusel. Legal redress for Negroes estails expensive court actions whose victories are the signil not for the capitulation of serregationists but rather for futher bouts with new delaying tactics. Even the recent action of the Attorney General n Alabama to strike at statewise measures, while welcome, carnot bring redress here and now. The delays inherent n test cases, where the U.S. Stpreme Court must ultimately rule, make sadly pertinent the comment of Chief Justice Earl Warren in the school desegngation cases: "Justice delayed is tustice denied."

LEARLY, the heart of the voting problem lies in the fact that the machinery for enforing this basic right is in the hands of state-appointed offi-cials answerable to the very people who believe they can continue to wield power in the South only so long as the Nogro is distranchised. No mater how many loopholes are plugged, no matter how mary irregularities are exposed, it s plain that the Federal Government must withdraw this costrol from the states or eise at up machinery for policing t effectively.

The patchwork reforms brought about by the laws of 1957, 1969 and 1964 have beloed but the denial of sulfrage has gone on too long, has caused too deep a hurt for Negroes to wait out the tine required by slow, piecemeal enforcement procedures. What is needed is the new voting-righs legislation promised for this n of Congress,

As I told our people in Dallis County two weeks ago, "We are going to bring a voting bil Selma. President Johnson his 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 n the history of the Negro struggle has responded with the es-thusiasm of Selma and he neighboring town of Marion, Als. Where Birmingham depended largely upon studens and unemployed adulta, Selma has involved fully 40 per cest of the Negro population in active demonstrations, and it least half the Negro popultion of Marion was arrested on one day.

Seldom has there been so complete a representation of every facet of community life. Teachers and students, clerry 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

**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 climinates 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, Louistana

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

(\$) 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 Selms, must be versatile enough to overcome more sophisticated resistance in cities like New Orleans, Chicago, New York or Miami.

NE of the difficult les sons we have learned is that you enanot 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 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.



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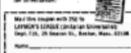
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