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Civil Right of Mississippians

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Editorial Page

Long Gone

Civil Right Of Mississippians

Why Mississippians should get so upset about the pending Civil Rights legislation in the U. S. Senate, we do not understand.

We are losing our freedoms, yes, if indeed they are not already gone. But it is not the Federal government or Congress that has taken them away from us—but the Mississippi State Legislature.

Now, if this sounds shocking and unbelievable, just examine the laws already passed by the current Legislature and signed into law by Governor Paul B. Johnson in 1964:

Under House Bill No. 64, local or county police officials may, simply by declaring that law and order are threatened, order you or any other citizen, or group of citizens off the streets. They may set curfews as to the hours of movement of individuals or groups. This means you would have to stay in your home and couldn't come out until the police said so.

If you resent the actions of these police officers and refuse to do what they say, they can arrest you and take you to jail. Once in jail you would be tried in a municipal court which could fine you \$300 and sentence you to 90 days in jail, either or both. These new, excessive penalties were set up in Senate Bill No. 1517. (Under the old law the penalties were \$100 fines and/or 30 days in jail.)

If you are dissatisfied with local conditions and you want to stage an orderly protest by peaceful picketing (a right upheld by the highest court in the land) you had better think twice before doing so. House Bill No. 546 prohibits picketing of all public buildings, streets, sidewalks and other places belonging to the state, county or city. And if you don't abide by this, they can fine you \$500 and six months in jail, either or both.

If a large number of Mississippians should feel so strongly about wrong inflicted upon them, fancied or real, and decided to try to defy the police authorities, then it would really be bad. The local police, whom you might be able to handle anywhere in the state except Jackson, could call upon neighboring police forces and they could come in and put down any citizen uprising. Against these armed police with

great firepower, tear gas, vicious dogs like in Nazi Germany, and other equipment and materials, any average citizen or group of citizens would be absolutely helpless—sort of like the people in Hungary. This is Senate Bill No. 1526.

There are many people in Mississippi, white and Negro, who have come to realize the only way they can be treated like human beings is to spend their money only at those places where they are treated as such—and to stay out of all other places. This is perfectly legal, but they had better not have a circular or handbill printed telling their friends not to trade at any particular place of business. This is called a boycott—and Senate Bill No. 1545—which was inspired by the Negro boycott of Canton merchants, provides that you can be fined as much as \$500 and sentenced to six months in jail for promoting a boycott.

* * * *

The foregoing constitute only five of the repressive laws enacted by our Legislature at this session. There are many, many more laws that may be invoked to maintain law and order in Mississippi—passed by recent previous sessions.

The fact that some of them are unconstitutional does not mean they won't be enforced and penalties exacted, a costly and time-consuming process.

Even now more laws are under study to reduce individual liberty and freedom in Mississippi.

Some readers will think, "Oh, this won't affect me. Those laws are just to control race demonstrations this summer—and won't be used against Mississippi white people." And, of course, the reader may be right. Certainly they are designed against the expected influx of visitors to our state this summer, white and Negro Civil Rights workers.

But this fact alone is enough to condemn them and without equivocation—in a just society all laws must be the same for everyone.

The law that restricts my neighbor's freedom today may be used against me tomorrow—and by next week it may have touched you, dear reader.

Anything else is unjust, immoral and corrupt.

We Must Learn To Live In The 20th Century

Jack Reed, of Tupelo, state MEC leader, called for self-discipline and informed leaders—leaders who would exert themselves with dedication and without fear—in a recent speech before the Mississippi Inter-Collegiate Council.

The need for self-discipline was emphasized by the former president of the Mississippi Economic Council in connection with crises which face the state today.

State Treasurer William Winter told the same group in convention at Columbus "the responsibility of intelligent citizens is to defend our institutions from irresponsible attacks."

Mr. Winter also said there is a great need in government for people willing to use in political life some of the ideas and ideals learned in college.

Informed, dedicated leaders who will express themselves without fear—how many of these do we have in our community?

How many citizens do we have who take the time and effort to be informed on the great issues of the day—citizens who refuse to take the word of any Tom, Dick or Harry, but insist on learning the truth for themselves, and then defend that truth at all costs?

How many citizens are there who are willing to defend our institutions from irresponsible attacks? Of which they are so many.

How many politicians do we have who reflect the highest type of moral leadership and the kind of ideals we learned in our early years at home and college?

An honest answer to these questions may help explain why young Mississippians are leaving the state in such large numbers—as soon as the parental apron strings are cut.

It will also explain why many executives of top companies in the nation will not bring their families to Mississippi to live—and why many more who are here want to leave, and will undoubtedly do so at the first opportunity.

The change in attitude and atmosphere, which is so desperately needed, can and will come about only when intelligent Mississippi citizens make up their minds they've had enough of the intolerance, prejudice and bigotry that so characterizes public life in the state, and speak out against it in voices loud and strong.

We must learn to live in the 20th century.

The world is not going to stand still—even for our beautiful Magnolia State.