

1957 Annual Report of the Washington Bureau

In the 1956 Annual Report of the Washington Bureau, we said:

“A top priority objective of those who support oppression is destruction of the rights to vote.” At a meeting in Atlanta in 1957, the audience was told “while the hue and cry has been about integration in the schools, what our opponents really fear is integration at the polls.”

An editorial appearing in the Indianapolis Recorder (November 30, 1957) said:

“The NAACP has long recognized that . . . political equality is the key to the whole problem. Manfully braving vicious criticism, unjust and illegal suppression and even the tepidity of the very people it seeks to advance, the NAACP keeps on like some massive, invincible vanguard pushing the Negro into the complete American picture. Not only will there be Negro Congressmen from the South in the very near future; there will be white candidates seeking their vote and making promises designed to get those votes. Success in this issue is assured, as the NAACP has all moral right behind it, reinforced, at last, by United States law with teeth.”

The Recorder’s reference to the new civil rights law is a reminder that in the 1956 report the Bureau said that the bill (H.R. 627) which was lost in the 84th Congress because the Senate failed to act placed “particular emphasis on protecting the right to vote.”

On August 29, 1957, for the first time in eighty-two years, a civil rights bill (which was H.R. 6127 in the 85th Congress) passed the United States Senate. On September 9, 1957, the President signed this bill and it became law.

Only the few who worked for the bill when the outlook seemed hopeless could really appreciate the enormous obstacle that had been overcome.

In spite of funeral predictions that the bill would die in the Eastland dominated Judiciary Committee of the U.S. Senate, in spite of the longest and silliest filibuster speech in the Senate’s history and in the face of numerous tricky obstructions, the bill became law.

When this legislation is enforced, there will be no more flummery about how many bubbles are in a bar of soap when colored citizens seek the right to register. After the stern restraint of a Federal injunction has been applied, those who used force, economic restrictions, and deception to keep the voting lists lily white will realize that the vote must be given to all without regard to race.