A National Danger

THE EYES OF every racist, bigot and labor-hater in the country are on California this November 3 to see if the electorate of that state can be led to believe what the New York Times calls “imitating the unhappiest state of Mississippi.”

“This is no ceremonial issue,” the Times said September 22 on the same day the enlarged meeting of the ILWU Executive Board was recontacting this same fact by appropriating $3,000 to supplement the $1 per member being raised by California ILWU locals to defeat Initiative 14.

Proposition 14 would repeal the Rumford Fair Housing Act and prohibit the state or any political subdivision of it from adopting any kind of legislation dealing with fair housing. It would establish a constitutionally protected absolute right to discriminate in the sale or rental of housing on the basis of race, religion or national origin.

If this ingeniously worded initiative can be put over—and there is grave danger that it can happen—you can bet everything including your last shirt that the gang behind it will decide the climate is ripe to bring out another right-to-work initiative, not only in California, but in all the other states where it has heretofore failed.

IMAGINE, IN THESE supposedly enlightened times, seeing this sign hanging on a house:

FOR SALE

Negros, Jews, Irish, Italians, Orientals, Mexicans or Catholics Need Not Apply

Shocking? It will be perfectly legal to hang out such a sign and otherwise advertise property in such manner if Proposition 14 should be adopted and stand up through the courts. Such signs were not uncommon in the suburbs of New York thirty years ago, but are now illegal under New York and New Jersey state laws.

Aside from the morality involved and the outrage done to equity and human justice, there are cogent reasons why trade unionists should turn out and vote against Proposition 14. For one thing it openly invites “blockbusting” by real estate speculators. The technique of these unscrupulous realtors is to frighten people into selling their homes at a sharp loss, of course, to the realtor, who then resells at an even sharper profit. For another thing, Proposition 14 would throw thousands of Californians out of work and sharply reduce the building of needed low or moderate cost housing. The state would lose $50 million in federal housing subsidies, which require that there be no discrimination.

THE RUMFORD ACT and other state laws pertaining to fair housing are not so stringent as the proponents of Proposition 14 would have people believe. The false picture projected is that anybody can knock on your door and demand to buy your house, or that any landlord must rent to anybody. The fact is that the Rumford Act only applies to large projects, such as tracts and large apartment buildings. It exempts projects involving up to four living units.

The fastest bucks in real estate are made by the ghetto landlords, and Proposition 14 is tailored to keep the ghetto, where worthless housing draws fancy rents, as well as rats, cockroaches and disease.

Proposition 14 conflicts with the 14th amendment to the US Constitution and to Article 1 of the California Constitution, which says: “All men . . . have certain inalienable rights, among which are those of acquiring, possessing and protecting property.” Proposition 14 would limit the “inalienable right of acquiring” insofar as minority groups are concerned, and certainly it would deny the “equal protection under the laws” as required by the 14th Amendment.

We urge our California members to vote, in their own very real interests, “NO” on 14.