United We Stand The Test

LESS than an hour after the Civil Rights Bill passed the Senate, Dr. Martin Luther King told reporters that when it becomes law, it will be tested all over the country. It should be. It’s not a perfect bill, but it’s a good bill—on paper. How good it is depends on how well it’s enforced—and that we won’t know until it’s tested.

As soon as the bill is passed, it’s easy to forget that we have rights one bill can’t secure—and we face tests one group can’t escape.

The rights of labor, the rights of Negroes, the rights of political dissenters, have always been tied together. As the nation faces a tense and possibly bloody summer, while simultaneously facing an election, it can be seen that just as different kinds of rights are bound together, so must different kinds of tests be faced together.

Certainly no better illustration exists than Senator Harry Goldwater. The Arizona Senator voted against the Civil Rights Bill. Of course this small-time, magnified by right to play into a national figure, is equally opposed to the rights of workers—and the same thinking is behind both positions.

This is, after all, the same Goldwater who shaped the Arizona “right-to-work” law, and tried in the Senate to force one on the whole country. Thus the amazing, and frightening, Goldwater “boom” is itself a test—surely a test for civil rights, surely a test for the rights of labor.

And surely the sullen hatred of the White South, already manifested in murder, is a test for labor too. It is not only that the same South is now the last refuge of anti-unionism. The whole concept of labor unionism, the whole meaning of the bargaining table and negotiating differences, breaks down when “law” becomes vengeance and acts only in the name of hatred and fear. On July 5 we recall a bloody example.

There are other tests ahead, to challenge the rights of everyone—tests we will all meet together or fail.

In Oregon, a vicious scab-labor initiative is on the ballot for November. This is a test, not alone of union strength, but of every man’s rights. Six years ago in California, Negroes voted overwhelmingly to defeat a so-called “right-to-work” initiative very much like the one now proposed in Oregon. Negro votes turned the tide that drowned such an initiative in Oklahoma recently.

When anyone’s rights are put to the test, we learn soon enough that rights, like a free nation, are indivisible.

In California, both the rights of Negroes and the rights of working people will be on the ballot directly.

The real estate lobby’s bigotry initiative—Proposition 14—would do more than repeal some present laws. It’s an amendment to the State Constitution; if it passes, no law to provide fair treatment for minorities in housing can ever be passed in California—not by the state government, not by cities nor counties.

Proposition 14 would put bigotry directly into the California Constitution, and California would join Mississippi and Alabama under the standard of white supremacy.

At the same time, another initiative, threatening the job security of workers in the railroad industry, will almost certainly be on the ballot. It’s a try at using the old “featherbedding” scare to cut jobs—and safety—the railroads.

These two California initiatives show clearly that all whose rights are in danger need each other.

Muder in Mississippi, Goldwater’s anti-civil-rights vote, the bigotry initiative in California, a scab law in Oregon, hatred in our cities north and south—all these make it clear that in the summer and fall to come, our rights face tests as trying as any of those already past. But they are tests for everyone. There is no better time to look at all Americans whose rights are threatened, and to remember the motto of our union: An injury to one is an injury to all.