

Crucial questions for November 4: Presidential pick, California's Proposition 14

From the Editors

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When "the tumult and the shouting dies" and the votes are counted on November 4, we shall first want to know who won the presidential election. The choice before the American people is not, in Dean Francis B. Sayre's notorious phrase, a sterile one; on the contrary, it is a crucial one. The election of Senator Barry Goldwater would cause a radical and disastrous change in the character and destiny of the nation. If the people elect Goldwater they choose a fantasy which has never existed in the American past and cannot be actualized in the future. However incredible such a choice seems to us and however strong our confidence that the American people's good sense will repudiate Senator Goldwater, we shall eagerly await official assurance of Johnson's election.

Second, we shall want to know—if Johnson sweeps the country—whether any moderate or liberal Republican politicians survive the landslide and retain enough power and position to challenge Goldwater's leadership of the Republican party. We share the belief that a strong two-party political system is essential to the nation's political health. The danger is that a badly defeated Republican party, if still controlled by Senator Goldwater and his rightist supporters, will shrink to a carping minority and lose all credibility as a national influence. The political health of the nation depends in part on a possible but unlikely combination of election results: a massive repudiation of Senator Goldwater's view of the nation's domestic and international character and the survival of those Republican politicians who have in varying degrees repudiated Senator Goldwater. Such a combination of events, however, requires ticket-splitting votes, and ticket-splitting votes require more thorough analysis of issues and candidates than most voters are used to making.

Third, we shall want to know what voters in California did to Proposition 14. Although Proposition 14 is technically a local matter, it is nevertheless the third most important issue facing the American people at the polls on November. In his "Spotlight on California" published in the September 30 *Century*, Robert McAfee Brown explained the national significance of California's vote on Proposition 14 and

argued convincingly for the defeat of this proposed amendment to the California state constitution. The proposed amendment, sponsored by the

California Real Estate Association (CREA), seeks to cancel the Rumford act which, adopted by the California legislature last year, prohibits discrimination on grounds of "race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry" in renting or selling a house. If adopted, Proposition 14 will amend the California constitution to read: "Neither the state nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall deny, limit or abridge, directly or indirectly, the right of any person, who is willing or desires to sell, lease or rent any part or all of his real property, to decline to sell, lease or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses." The amendment would thus not only invalidate the Rumford act but would also prohibit any further attempts in California to deal with the ghettoization of Negroes by legislation. Moreover, like various interposition movements in the south, Proposition 14 is California's own peculiar attack on the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Although there is reason to hope that Proposition 14 would for this reason be declared unconstitutional by the California supreme court or, if not, by the U.S. Supreme Court, many California organizations opposed to the amendment are not depending on that possibility. Churches and other religious organizations, labor unions, educational and bar associations and various other social and civic groups are vigorously opposing the adoption of Proposition 14. Against them and for the amendment are the California Real Estate Association, the right-wing California Republican Assembly, Young Republicans, southern California segregationists and many Californians who naively conclude that the Rumford act not only compels them to lease, rent or sell on a nondiscriminatory basis but also compels them to lease, rent or sell whether they want to or not. Strong forces have locked horns in this contest and the outcome remains unpredictable.

Proposition 14 threatens racial justice in California and racial progress throughout the nation. If adopted by the people of California and not speedily struck down by the courts, Proposition 14 will generate similar attacks on the rights of Negroes in many parts of the United States. Furthermore, its adoption will jeopardize fair housing laws similar to the Rumford act in other parts of the country, increasing the vulnerability of such laws to the attacks of segregationists and weakening the support some moderates now give to freedom of residence.

Whether churches and ministers should support individual political candidates and political parties may be a moot question. But the duty of Christians and their

churches to champion the right of every man to live where he chooses and can afford to live, unrestricted by his race, religion or nationality, should not be debatable. The British weekly the *Economist*, in a rare tribute to the political and social power of the churches, says that "the best hope for defeating [Proposition 14] seems to lie in the churches; sermons were preached against it from hundreds of pulpits, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, on September 13th." Since that time many of the churches and ministers have kept up an incessant attack on Proposition 14. If they win they will save their state from a degrading injustice against Negroes and other ethnic groups and will spare the country a long, difficult fight against similar attempts to segregate Negro housing by law. We shall know November 4 whether Californians in this case help solve the nation's racial problem or compound it.