

A straw in the racial wind

From the Editors

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The Washington, D.C., correspondent for the *Economist*, writing several days in advance of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, predicted that however successful the march might be in numbers it would nevertheless "have a pathetic quality about it." The correspondent was referring to the fact that the march was originally conceived as a massive counteraction to a filibuster against President Kennedy's civil rights bill and to the probability that the marchers would shoot their gun before the target came into sight. While the marchers assembled in Washington congressional business continued as usual. The correspondent was concerned about the possibility that the demonstration would erupt in violence and that this development would increase the "anti-Negro backlash" of stiffening white American resistance to Negro protests. The anticipated, feared and in some cases hoped-for violence did not occur. In fact the *Economist* commented following the event that the 200,000 marchers "paraded with impressive respectability and more impressive restraint."

Nothing can detract from the magnitude of the march as an episode in the long history of the Negro's struggle for justice. In its dignity and its dream, in its immensity and its unity, in its composite constituency the march was without example or parallel in American history. There has never been anything like it before; it may never be repeated with the same degree of dignity and restraint. Even so, the pathos remains. On the day following the march a Negro couple, the Horace Bakers, were driven from their new home in a white community by 1,500 enraged and screaming white people who left the Bakers' house a shambles. Soon afterwards Alabama Governor George C. Wallace again defied the U.S. government and compelled a delay in the opening of Alabama public schools on a desegregated basis. Moreover, there is evidence that an increasing rather than diminishing number of Republican congressmen are tempted to add their votes to those of southern Democrats to defeat or at least to emasculate the President's civil rights bill. It is much too early to judge the total impact of the march for jobs and freedom on the conscience of the nation, but so far it seems to have had little impact on the

Congress it was meant to influence.

There is at least one encouraging straw in the racial wind. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in its September 6 "Washington Wire" column that churches are inspiring "a flood of mail to Congress backing strong civil rights legislation. Lots of letters reflect the stand of national church groups, or of local pastors. Almost half the mail of some Midwest lawmakers reveals church influence." If this is so the churches may through penance for their lassitude about the Negro's plight help turn the tide of opposition to the Negro's claim for justice. Much mail should be followed by more mail until senators and representatives begin to view the Negro's struggle—as many of them as yet do not—as this nation's most critical domestic problem and until they begin to treat the Negro's plea with honor. Sending an avalanche of letters to Washington is what religious white people should do now, whether the credit for a good civil rights bill redounds to them or not. They owe the Negro this kind of recompense for their long silence and inactivity. They owe their professed faith and morality an obedience which makes them assail the ears and eyes of their congressmen until justice is done.