

Is the civil rights issue turned against unions?

Yes indeed; it has for nearly a generation been the chief weapon of union foes in the south, and more recently has become the favorite bludgeon of right-wing extremists everywhere.

The very fact that unions believe that "all men are created equal" was an anti-labor weapon long before the Supreme Court took the same view. Race-baiting of the most virulent kind is standard practice in any southern organizing campaign, and has been widely employed in attempts to disrupt established unions. Labor's stand on civil rights has even been injected into wholly unrelated legislative issues.

AFL-CIO President George Meany gave labor's answer in an address several years ago—an answer that still stands. He said:

"If we have to practice discrimination to organize workers, then organizing will have to wait until we educate the unorganized.

"If we have to lose a vote in Congress . . . because we take a stand on civil rights, that is a price we are prepared to pay."

Currently the radical right has taken up the segregationist outcry, charging that an FEPC would mean the discharge of senior white workers to make room for Negroes. This, of course, is absurd.

It is true that a seniority system which systematically discriminated against Negroes could be overthrown under the proposed bill. The AFL-CIO is in full accord with that.

But the seniority system itself, where fairly administered, would be left untouched. The AFL-CIO is in full accord with that, too. The job safeguards built up by the labor movement over the years—including the seniority system—are important to all workers. They are color-blind.

These safeguards have special importance to members of minority groups, who might otherwise be subject to discrimination by an unthinking majority in times of stress. To destroy these safeguards would be an inter-racial disaster.

