

# A Long, Dark Night for Georgia?

*Calvin Kytle*

**T**HIS month a political twilight may fall over Georgia—already one of the dark spots on the map of American democracy. The night may be a long one.

For Herman Talmadge is ominously confident of winning the nomination for governor in the September Democratic primary. (In this one-party State that, of course, means the same thing as election.) He is a worthy son of "Ole Gene," the red-gallused, hate-spouting demagogue who died in December 1946. And Young Herman's lieutenants have openly boasted that once he gets to the State House, they will be "in the saddle for fifty years."

Many Georgians fear that this is precisely what is going to happen. They foresee an uninterrupted succession of Talmadge administrations—based on a political machine more efficient than Herman's father ever dreamed of and maintained by ruthless suppression of all dissent within the party. So real is the threat Talmadge poses that ex-Governors Ellis Arnall and Ed Rivers have stopped their war with each other to present a single front against him.

In a private conversation, one prominent Georgia liberal recently expressed his fears something like this:

"If Herman is elected, he and his people are going to play for keeps. They'll find some new way to keep the Negroes from voting.

After all, they've already vowed 'to stay one jump ahead of the Supreme Court.' They've also talked of deputizing every county sheriff into the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. My God, it's not inconceivable that from this bureau Herman could organize a personal gestapo that would make the one set up last year by Fielding Wright in Mississippi look like a Boy Scout troop.

"Not only that. From the day Herman's elected, you'll probably see more and more floggings and more and more cross-burnings. His election will act like a signal on people of Klan mentality. They'll consider themselves free to commit all manner of atrocities, all with impunity, all in the interests of 'true white Southerners.'"

**T**HIS may be an extreme view, but it is not untypical of the worries now troubling many Georgians. Because Herman tried to establish a rule by force once before—only last year—and he nearly got away with it.

Eugene Talmadge died just a month before he was to take office as governor; under such circumstances the State constitution does not clearly provide for a successor. Leaders of the legislature thereupon took it on themselves to name Herman, who had anticipated his father's death and had managed to get some six hundred-odd Talmadge faithfuls to

*Mr. Kytle is a Georgia journalist who has worked on the Atlanta Constitution, served with the Army in the Pacific, and will join the journalism faculty of Emory University this fall.*



write his own name on the general election ballot.

Having come to power in this curious fashion, Herman quickly entrenched himself. He shoved Ellis Arnall, the outgoing Governor, into the capitol rotunda, changed the locks on the doors of the executive suite, and then unwrapped his legislative program. Under the guise of "preserving white supremacy," he introduced a series of bills which would have given him complete control of the State's election processes—measures that would have paralyzed all party opposition.

The protest that followed was notable, even in a State where politics is seldom mild. Newspapers were flooded with more letters than they had space to print. Students marched on the State capitol. In some thirty counties, citizens rallied for mass demonstrations. Through speeches, resolutions, and telegrams, thousands of Georgians sent their legislators the simple reminder—drawn from the State constitution—that "all government, of right, originates with the people." Herman Talmadge was trying to steal the party, people kept mumbling; he mustn't get away with it.

If need be, some of them said, they'd create their own Democratic party, hold their own primary, and beat him in the next general election. The upshot was a grass-roots organization called The Aroused Citizens of Georgia, which promised to grow into a distinct party revolt.

But nothing came of it. By last spring, all the rebels were back safe and snug in the party yard. No second party developed; no similar upsurge of organized protest will confront Herman in this month's election.

Why did the 1947 movement toward a second party fail? Partly because the movement was largely illusory, its strength more potential than actual; and partly because, at the critical moment, Herman's bid for power was checked in the State courts. While public protests continued intermittently throughout the sixty-three days that Herman occupied the governor's chair, circumstances never required a full mobilization of anti-Talmadge sentiment, nor a sharp definition of the principle at stake.

After the first tumultuous week, the people's mood changed to one of uneasy sus-

pense. They were waiting for a ruling from the State supreme court which would decide whether Herman was to stay in office, or whether the lieutenant-governor, M. E. Thompson, was to take his place.

Once the dispute was settled for Thompson, the Aroused Citizens virtually disappeared. And a few weeks later, when Thompson vetoed the Talmadge-passed white primary bill, which would have stripped all election laws from the statute books and entrusted them to a few party leaders, the dramatic incentive for a second party was destroyed. The Democratic party had been saved, and arguments for a new party appeared academic and futile—as they had always appeared to the mass of Georgia voters.

**Y**ET there is a smouldering resentment toward the Democratic party in Georgia that could explode someday—perhaps soon—into organized rebellion.

During the past two years more and more sober-minded Georgians have come to believe that the Talmadge kind of demagoguery is perpetuated more through some inherent flaw in the party structure than through the strength of its peculiar appeal to rural voters. They have come to suspect, too, that the same economic forces which control Talmadge also control his opposition within the party.

So long as this control prevails, they wonder whether good government—even decent, sensible government such as Ellis Arnall gave them—can ever be made secure. In particular, a growing number of Georgia citizens are troubled by the Democratic party's persistent violation of an elemental principle of democracy: the right of every qualified citizen to vote and to have his vote counted.

The political scientists have been saying for years that Georgia's Democratic party works as an instrument for minority rule. It was not until the 1946 primary, however, that people generally were shocked into believing it. As usual, it was Eugene Talmadge who provided the shock. Talmadge won that primary, even though he received 16,000 fewer votes than the strongest of his three opponents—even though almost 100,000 more votes were cast against him than for him. He won it by means of a political machine which is unique in both its structure and its strength.



## II

**T**HE machine that runs Georgia has no Hagues, no Pendergasts, no Crumps—no recognized leader, no formal discipline.

It is a product of history, and it operates naturally, almost inevitably, without any need for conspiracy. It depends on the money of corporations, the expert skill of a few politicians, and the exaggerated influence of local leaders in many small counties. Most of all, it depends on Georgia's astonishing county unit system.

This system—unheard of anywhere else in America—is a wonderfully efficient device for canceling the votes of a considerable part of the electorate. It means that State elections are decided not by the votes of 700,000 people (the number who voted in 1946) but by the votes of 159 counties. It means that representation in the legislature is based only remotely on population.

Under Georgia law, the eight most populous counties have three representatives in the lower house, the next thirty counties have two each, and the remaining 121 have one apiece. Now, the eight largest counties have a total population of 1,032,092, or about a third of the State's population; but they have only 24 representatives, or 11.7 per cent of the 205 members of the House. The Democratic primaries are rigged on a similar basis; each county is entitled to twice as many "unit votes" as it has members in the House. The result is that every election is tremendously weighted in favor of the sparsely-populated rural counties. The half million residents of Atlanta's Fulton County, for instance, carry no more weight at the polls than the 45,000 people of Troup County.

By disfranchising the people in the large population centers, the county unit system pares down the electorate to a number that can easily be influenced and, when necessary, manipulated. It also means that there is not one race for a particular State office, but 159 different races—one for each county whose unit votes must be won by a plurality within that county. This inflates the bargaining power of county political leaders, and puts a premium on any candidate's ability to deal with these local barons.

**T**HE system serves as an excellent device through which a few wealthy corporation officials, a few skilled and ambitious politicians, and a corps of local county leaders can run the State to suit themselves.

The railroads which dominated Georgia politics at the turn of the century now share control with about ten other important economic groups. Perhaps the most powerful of all is the Georgia Power Company, whose chief political agent is generally recognized as the smartest fixer in the State; his influence is said to be so great that he normally names the officers and chairmen of the most important committees of the General Assembly. The pipe lines and the trucking lines have become an increasingly strong force in the past ten years. Others with a stake in politics—often a valid stake—include the liquor dealers, who face the perennial threat of new dry laws; the soft drinks people, who are perpetually scared of a soft drinks tax; the banks which have investments in all corporations; various independent contractors, who make their living out of State business; and the textile mills, whose owners have found that the best way to fight the unions is through prohibitive legislation.

Officials of these corporations play politics in Georgia for the same reasons that business men play politics everywhere—partly to defend their interests, partly to advance them. Nor is there anything original about their techniques. They contribute generously to the campaign coffers of *all* candidates for the most important State offices, keep the most influential lawyer-politicians on retainer, and maintain a troop of trained lobbyists to seduce members of the General Assembly.

These corporations do not express themselves through a single faction; they dominate all factions. Their preference in politicians includes both conventionally conservative men like Senator Walter George and colorfully conservative men like the late Eugene Talmadge. (Currently they are much put out with Ellis Arnall, who they say, insisted on carrying out a liberal administration in violation of a gentlemen's agreement.)

Money, of course, is the root of their power. They are the only people in the State who can afford to pay the high cost of politics. Experienced politicians in Georgia say flatly that no candidate for governor can expect to run



better than a sack race unless he is backed by at least \$100,000. Clearly, in a State where the per capita income is only \$804, it is the rich men who make up the campaign chests. That kind of money simply cannot be collected in small contributions from the zealous masses—although coins and dollar bills used to come unsolicited into Gene Talmadge's headquarters by the thousands.

Understandably, Georgia's corporation leaders are devoted to the county unit system. It has proved an almost impregnable defense against any serious threat to the *status quo*. Moreover, since the State is split into 159 distinct county governments—of which only the richest can provide adequate services for their people—this system helps preserve the ignorance and poverty on which their power depends. Finally, the politicians have told their corporate angels that the system sharply reduces the cost of electioneering. They point out that to conduct a precinct-by-precinct campaign in metropolitan Atlanta would cost at least \$15,000. As it is, the politicians can forget about Atlanta's six unit votes; the same amount of money spent on a dozen small counties will guarantee the delivery of as many as twenty unit votes.

**G**EOORGIA counties vary widely in the character of their political leadership. In many counties, the person of most influence is likely to be the head of an old and prominent family, whose advice is followed mainly because the people still believe in the authority of a cultivated aristocracy. In others he may be a banker, or a big landowner, a dealer in farm equipment, or almost anybody to whom large numbers of people owe money—and who therefore can exert an implied threat of economic reprisal. Or he may be a doctor, a lawyer, a judge, a newspaper editor, or a preacher—someone who at one time or another has done some service for almost everybody in the county. In many counties, too, there is no one leader, nor a group of leaders of common mind, but two or more rival factions of almost equal strength, made up of semi-professional politicians motivated by a thirst for spoils.

Besides their acknowledged mastery of the people, these leaders either hold the key elective offices in the county—commissioner, sheriff, tax collector—or control the men who

do. They constitute the courthouse rings, and usually they fix the details of the election procedure—where the polls are to be located and who manages them, how and when the registration list is purged, and sometimes what kind of ballot is used. A few of them are men known for their aggressive honesty, but an alarming number are unashamedly venal. It is commonly reported, though impossible to prove, that about forty of Georgia's counties can be delivered for cash.

What it takes to win a State election, therefore, is the ability to know and deal with the political leaders in those counties whose combined unit votes will make a majority. This ability comes only after long experience in State politics. It requires an amoral attitude, a mind for details, a highly-developed gift for organizing, and a salesman's personality. A man with this sort of talent is indispensable to any winning campaign.

By all odds the most conspicuous and most resourceful of such men is Roy Harris, former speaker of the Georgia House and currently a prominent figure in the Talmadge camp. At one time or another, Harris has worked for every successful candidate for governor since Richard B. Russell moved up to the U. S. Senate in 1933. He managed three campaigns for Ed Rivers. With Rivers' approval, he managed Ellis Arnall in 1942. Then in 1946—disappointed because neither Rivers nor Arnall would encourage his own ambitions for the governorship—he went over to Eugene Talmadge. After Gene's death, he conducted the whirlwind campaign among legislators that put Herman in the governor's chair for two months.

Such spectacular successes have so awed the politically uninitiated that Harris is commonly regarded as something of a magician. He insists, however, that there's no mystery to Georgia politics. "To win in Georgia," he has said, "you've simply got to know the counties. You've got to know who the leaders are—I mean the real leaders. You've got to know how the counties line up, what counties are in the bag, what counties to work on, and what counties to forget about. You've got to be a smart organizer and work hard."

**T**HIS system of fixed political controls endures not only because of the big money and ambitions of a few wilful



men. It is rooted deep in the culture of rural Georgia; it is perpetuated through the ignorance, the psychology, and the bad political habits of the mass of Georgia voters. No democratic reforms can get to first base without some support from the people of the small rural counties; who make up sixty-five per cent of the State's population. But these are the very people who will resist them the most strongly.

**A** NEW party, in particular, would go against the grain of rural Georgia. To most farmers, it would appear as the trinity of their most deep-seated prejudices—the Negro, organized labor, and the city “radicals.” It would be difficult to say exactly which of these Georgians fear and hate the most. Since they have had no direct experience with unions they believe unreservedly the propaganda they read in the rural press, and that the president of the Georgia Farm Bureau (who fronted the drive for last year's anti-labor legislation) has told them—quite simply, that labor is the farmer's worst enemy, the destroyer of free enterprise, and a sinister agent of Communism.

Their attitude toward the Negro, of course, is historic. It is from these people that most lynch mobs are formed. It is from them that one hears most often that “a nigger's just like a hound dog—worse you treat him the better he likes you.” Their hostility toward city folks and city ways is as easily expressed: “Them and their money . . . them and their wicked talk . . . them and their education.”

Any reform movement would be further handicapped by the farmer's general indifference to a constructive platform. The routine political promises—better schools, more paved farm-to-market roads, improved hospitals, and so on—are made by all candidates, and viewed cynically by almost all voters. Personality, rather than a program, is what is demanded of the successful candidate. Above all else, he must somehow manage to make the poorly-educated, economically-depressed farmers feel that they are of superior worth as human beings. Eugene Talmadge owed his popularity to his ability to identify himself with them, to make them feel that they were better than the stuck-up city slickers. He put cattle to grazing on the lawn of the governor's mansion, in the middle of

Atlanta's fashionable Ansley Park, and they loved him for it.

Lack of interest in serious issues is accompanied by a happy unconcern for democratic practices at the polls, plus a remarkable tolerance for election frauds. Georgia has no mandatory secret ballot law, and selection of the type of ballot used is left largely up to each individual county. Only about 80 of the 159 counties have adopted a secret ballot. The reason was aptly summed up by one election manager, who—when asked if he wouldn't favor its adoption—said: “Why hell no! I think you oughta know how some a these lyin' sonsabitches voted.” Another reason, perhaps, is that most rural voters regard secrecy as of little importance. They say proudly that they don't care who knows how they vote, and they're inclined to think there's something sneaky about the man who does.

**G**EOORGIA'S cities have ballot irregularities, too, but there the citizen's sense of guilt is more articulate. It was a direct appeal to conscience that brought reform victories in two of the largest cities, Augusta and Savannah, in 1946; Fulton County alone has adopted voting machines.

In only a few of the rural counties, and then mostly in the county seats, is there any such educated regard for democratic principles. Votes often are sold for a dollar and a slug of stump rum; the dead and insane are voted; returns frequently are not counted at all, but concocted. In one recent county primary, votes were sold as openly as if they were at auction—as, indeed, they were. Going from candidate to candidate to seek the highest bidder, some voters received as much as fifty dollars.

One family of five sold their block of five votes for a hundred dollars (“Why,” commented a schoolboy, “those people can make more money selling votes than they can farming.”) All told, between thirty and forty per cent of the votes cast were estimated to have been bought.

Recent disclosures of such sensational abuses have moved some counties to launch clean-up campaigns. It is too early to say how effective they may be. In some counties they obviously won't get far, because of a general fear psychosis and the tight control of the county rings. More than a year ago.



The *Atlanta Journal* exposed some audacious padding of returns in the general election at Telfair County, the home county of the Talmadge family. About four hundred more votes, for example, were reported in the official consolidated returns than there were voters on the precinct tally sheets. The tally sheet from one precinct listed the names of thirty-four persons who either were dead, or had moved away, or swore they hadn't voted. The *Journal's* disclosures created quite a stir—everywhere but in Telfair County. These people hardly dared discuss them outside the privacy of their own homes. To date there have been no prosecutions. When a young veteran tried to organize opposition to the entrenched ruling clique, he was first beaten up and later defeated at the polls.

### III

FROM all of this, it would seem that the machine which rules Georgia is almost impregnably entrenched in the Democratic party of the State. Consequently, a few heretics are coming to believe that the only way popular rule can ever be established in Georgia is through a second party.

For years they have tried to get some readjustment of the county unit system, but nothing seems more hopeless; no politician is eager to change a law on which his job depends. In 1946 they went to the federal courts, arguing that the system operated in denial of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and asking that it be outlawed as unconstitutional. They got no redress. Three federal judges admitted the system's "glaring inequality," but said that the remedy should be found through legislation. Their only way out, therefore, seems to be through another party.

The way out is hardly likely to be through Henry Wallace's party, however. Only 310 delegates showed up for the party's founding convention this spring, and it will come as quite a surprise if they manage to get on the November ballot. (To be recognized legally in Georgia, they must submit a petition of 55,000 signatures.) Far removed from the Georgia culture and the Georgia mind, Wallace himself seems the embodiment of all things foreign and hated which Georgians scorn so vehemently as "outside interference."

It's no longer absurd, though, to think that a significant number of Georgians might turn Republican. Recent public opinion samplings show that a good many life-long Democrats will vote the Republican national ticket this November, purely out of spite; they'll be hanged if they'll vote for Harry Truman and *his* civil rights program.

It looks really as if, for the first time since Reconstruction, the Republicans are about to make an active bid for a Georgia following. The local organization, after a long and enervating squabble between factions, is now securely in the hands of a group favoring party expansion. Tom Dewey has promised to help them. What's more, Ralph McGill, editor of the influential *Atlanta Constitution*, is now determinedly advising Georgia conservatives to go Republican. "The Republican party offers no comfort in the field of civil rights or State rights," he has been writing, "but it is not going to be as far left as the new Democratic party which is being constructed out of the one which died at Philadelphia."

To date, McGill's editorials have served chiefly to make the Republican party seem more respectable. This in itself is an important contribution. Heretofore, among the mass of Georgians, prejudice against the name Republican has been even stronger than the prejudice against Catholics; in 1928, when Republican strength was at its peak, Georgians cast 129,000 votes for Al Smith—a Catholic but a Democrat—and only 99,000 for Herbert Hoover, a Protestant but a Republican. Georgia is the only State in the Union that has never cast its electoral vote for a Republican.

But for Georgia to develop the strong two-party system McGill wants, it would seem necessary first that Georgia's Democratic party be purged of its present conservative leadership. It is remotely possible that that leadership might secede, leaving the way open for progressives to take over. But so far Georgia's leaders have refused to go along with the extremists among the revolting Southerners; they have shown no serious inclination to bolt. It may be, therefore, that the only way liberals can capture the Democratic party of Georgia is to leave it—leave it, form a new party of their own, and then ask the national Democrats for recognition.



**G**EOORGIA has the raw material for such a home-grown, liberal party. It can be found among organized labor, among the one million Negroes, and among the white middle class of the cities. These are the groups which, since the Philadelphia convention, have emerged more clearly than ever as the authentic Democrats. They are the same groups which have been most neglected and scorned by Georgia's Democratic party.

At the moment, however, each of these groups must be considered an abstraction. Only the Negroes have an established political viewpoint, and they have it only on the fundamental right of suffrage. Labor is divided. The grievances of the urban middle class have just begun to take on clear shape. There is little liaison among the three, and absolutely no force to pull them together. Moreover, none really wants to have to start a new party. The only thing certain is that in each is the discontent of which reform parties are made.

Of the three groups, labor has been easily the most vocal. In 1947 the General Assembly enacted two bills which labor has interpreted as being even more hostile than the Taft-Hartley Act. They outlaw the closed shop, the union shop, mass picketing, and the involuntary check-off. Neither the AF of L nor the CIO has submitted peaceably. The AF of L has defied the State to enforce the law. The CIO, with more method, has put its plague on both Talmadge and Thompson.

Labor is pitifully weak, however. The unions probably hold at least a hundred thousand votes, but these votes are cast almost exclusively in the big cities—Atlanta, Macon, Columbus, Rome, Augusta, Savannah—where the county unit system makes them virtually worthless. Labor, therefore, is a political factor in only two of the ten Congressional districts and in eight of the 159 counties. To quote Roy Harris: "In a State election, we just forget about labor."

Labor would like to break loose from the shackles of the county unit system. Blocking any attempt, though, is the continued friction between the AF of L and CIO, plus the lack of political consciousness among AF of L members. The AF of L traditionally has sought to protect its interests by negotiating with the powers of the Democratic party,

rather than by educating its 200,000 members for political action. If labor ever does become a moving spirit behind a new party, the initiative almost certainly will have to come from the CIO.

**S**ENTIMENT among Negroes for a second party—what little is expressed—grows out of this fact: in the counties where they have been able to vote in strength, their votes don't count; in the counties where they have their greatest potential strength, they are hardly allowed to vote at all. Their struggle to become a recognized political force is blocked on one hand by the county unit system, and on the other by the terrible tenacity of race prejudice.

Negroes have been allowed to vote in Georgia Democratic primaries only since March 1946, when the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that no person could be barred from the polls on account of color. Their voting record since then has been phenomenal; about 100,000 voted in the gubernatorial primary of 1946. (In the North Carolina primary that year, no more than 55,000 Negroes voted, and in most other Southern States Negro participation was considerably less.) Since then they've voted in perhaps forty county and municipal primaries.

In 1946 those Negroes who cast free votes opposed Eugene Talmadge solidly, and of this fact the Talmadge following has had much to say. If it hadn't been for Ole Gene, they argue—and if it hadn't been for the county unit system—the "niggers" would have taken over Georgia. For Negroes, however, the experience of 1946 carried a different kind of lesson. A cursory study of the primary returns showed that their votes can never carry much influence unless they manage to vote in reasonable numbers in the rural counties which hold the balance of power. Half their hundred thousand votes had been cast in the disfranchised cities, and the other half in areas where Negroes are few and the political temperament is predominantly anti-Talmadge anyway.

In only one of the 39 counties which comprise Georgia's Black Belt—those counties where Negroes actually outnumber whites—were Negroes allowed to vote in strength. They were restrained by fear, intimidation,



threats of violence, and (most effectively) by illegal purging of the registration lists. About 150,000 Negroes were registered for the 1946 primary. Legal and illegal purging in some 60 counties reduced that number to less than 125,000, and would have reduced it even more except for the firm intervention of federal judges. In the counties of the Black Belt most Negroes were kept from even registering. A Taylor County Negro who was murdered by a white man the day after the election was the only Negro in the county who had voted.

To make their newly-gained citizenship meaningful, Georgia Negroes can do one of two things. They can keep patient and go slow, hoping by exemplary behavior to win over more and more sympathetic whites in the tension areas; and they can keep trying through FBI investigations and court injunctions to moderate the wilful practices of election officials. Or, they can withdraw from the Democratic primary, and help form a new party in which the voting strength they have already earned in the cities might begin to pay off.

Unquestionably the Negro would prefer to stay Democratic, for the risks in a new party are incalculable. If he became the vanguard for such a movement, the result might be anything from an increase in routine discrimination to a series of explosive race riots. Furthermore, the Georgia Negro leadership has fought many years for recognition in the Democratic party, and it does not want to jeopardize it now. That's why most Negroes—many of whom have a deep spiritual attachment to Henry Wallace—are shying away from the Wallace party.

At the moment their main political objective is simply to establish a bargaining position. They mean to exchange their votes for some simple, concrete benefits, such as better schools, Negro policemen, street lights, and paved roads through the colored communities. In a State where virtually all officeholders are Democratic, they can expect to make their influence felt only so long as they vote Democratic.

They probably will stay Democratic, therefore, just so long as the Democratic party holds out some promise of granting them full enfranchisement. They might change their minds, though, if the Democratic party passes

measures to wipe out what strength they have already mustered. And Herman Talmadge has made it very plain that such repressive measures will be taken if he's elected governor.

**N**O LESS than labor and the Negro, Georgia's white city people have been victimized by the county unit system. More and more of them are beginning to protest. It's not uncommon now at a dinner party in Atlanta to hear some indignant housewife say, with the intensity of fresh discovery: "Did you know that in Fulton County it takes 106 votes to equal one vote in Chattahoochee County?" City people are also beginning to grumble about a system that makes them pay most of the State's taxes, yet gives them the least say about how the money is spent.

Few of these middle-class city folks have any clear understanding of the way in which the State's social and economic controls have been welded into the Democratic party. nevertheless, they have become overwhelmingly hostile to the Talmadge machine. Of the seven large cities in Georgia, only Savannah is known as a Talmadge town; and even there the Talmadge sentiment has been largely dissipated within the past two years as the result of a successful reform movement.

It would be absurd, of course, to assume that this anti-Talmadge feeling stems wholly from principle. In much of it—particularly in Atlanta—there is a wide streak of snobbery. All the same, it was members of the middle class—the sincere humanists, the intellectuals, the vaguely discontented, as well as the snobs—who revolted against Eugene Talmadge's meddling with the university system in 1942, and who fought hardest against his son's grab for power in 1947.

Ellis Arnall was their kind of governor. The return to old-style politics, which came with the close of his term, has been a great disappointment to them. They were momentarily happy over the court decision that put M. E. Thompson in the governor's chair. They soon learned, however, that Thompson's only hope for survival as a figure in the Democratic party was in alliance with an old-line machine that was almost as unsavory as Talmadge's—a machine headed by ex-Governor Ed Rivers, whose two administra-



tions are remembered mostly for subtle dealings in highway contracts, wholesale dispensation of pardons, and unrestrained use of the militia. Many of them will vote for Thompson in this month's primary only as the lesser of the two evils.

What little political consciousness there is in the city middle class is due largely to the work of a few non-partisan service organizations. The League of Women Voters has done much in the past few years to stir up concern over defects in the election process. A few years ago the Citizens' Fact-Finding Movement did a remarkable job in stimulating interest in the State's basic needs; it did its job so well, in fact, that Arnall credits his election and many of his administrative reforms to the spirit this movement provoked. The women's church societies have created a new awareness of the conflict between Christianity and the political exploitation of race.

But the Committee for Georgia, which represents the sole attempt to mobilize Georgia liberals for political action, has failed; its most active members were the officers who resigned last year after quarreling with its parent body, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. In loyalty and political astuteness, no group of progressives has ever been able to match the powerful Georgia Farm Bureau, or a half dozen lesser economic groups.

There is serious doubt, too, that the mass of white collar Georgians would join any alliance with labor and the Negro. By many of these people, both are equally feared because they pose a constant threat to their cherished sense of superiority. Curiously, others who express tolerance for the Negro savagely distrust the unions.

Only a small minority—persons of painfully vicarious natures—have begun to identify their own interests with those of both Negroes and union members. They are the people who are down on the Talmadge blacklist as renegades, radicals, and "nigger-lovers." These people do not know quite what to expect if Herman should win the September primary.

In February a group of them met with Negroes at an Atlanta Lutheran church to discuss the President's Civil Rights Report. Along with the regular press reporters, there appeared two unfamiliar figures—one repre-

senting himself as a free-lance writer, the other as a photographer for the *Macon World*. While the photographer busied himself taking indiscriminate pictures of the audience—black men seated next to white women, black men shaking hands with white men—the other roamed throughout the parking area, pad and pencil in hand, methodically recording license tags. Before the meeting was over, few there had any doubts about who these men were.

They were staff members of *The Statesman*, Talmadge's personal newspaper, and they were gathering names for future reference.

#### IV

FOR all these reasons, it is clear that the existing raw material for a liberal party in Georgia cannot readily be crystallized into an effective political organization. Indeed, the only expressed sentiment for such an experiment, up till now, has come from a few professors and city intellectuals—a tiny and ineffectual group of pariahs, cursedly liberated from the shibboleths of Southern tradition.

At heart, the progressives in Georgia are not much inclined toward party politics. They are more interested in trying to work out some very basic problems. Like all gradualists, they have accepted the necessity of working within the boundaries of their existing society. In Georgia the truth seems to be that this society is not yet prepared for democracy. An enormous number of people either do not understand its simplest principles, or, understanding, flatly do not want it. Knowing this, many Georgia liberals would prefer to continue to work as they have been working—through the labor unions; through the churches to create a better understanding between the races; through the schools to develop better citizenship; through non-partisan service clubs to reduce fraud in elections—in short, to create a climate of opinion in which democracy eventually may be possible.

To enter active politics through a second party would make them suspect. If they got too far ahead of the people, they might lose what little effectiveness they already have. As long as they have the chance, then, they would



rather keep on working—painfully and slowly—as good Democrats, always hoping that their work might be speeded up by the return of Ellis Arnall, or by the emergence of somebody like him.

But today many of these people are wondering if they would have that chance in a Georgia ruled by Herman Talmadge. They don't take much stock in the soothing talk that, once in office, Herman will mend his ways. If he does set up the iron-handed political dictatorship which many of them expect, then they clearly must abandon all hope for reform and progressive government through the Democratic party. In that event, a new party might appear to be the last desperate remedy—in spite of their own reluctance and their scant prospects for success.

**I**NDEED, it is not unlikely that a few of the more aggressive representatives of labor, the Negroes, and the middle-class city white folks might make the attempt. They probably would call themselves Independent Democrats, or something similar, hoping to get the recognition of the national party whenever they come to power. At first they would try to work at the community level for basic election reforms; and when they had a following large enough to qualify in the general election, they would offer their own

nominees for State office against the regular Democratic machine.

This would mean a clean break with politics as it has been known in Georgia ever since the Civil War. The adventure would appeal only to the stout-hearted. Theirs would be no transient political movement, inspired merely by a distaste for Herman Talmadge. They would be aiming for nothing less than a revolution in Georgia's archaic political structure, and in the whole complex of economic control that goes with it. Against them would be arrayed the same forces that historically have exercised a genteel tyranny over sharecroppers and workers, kept Negroes in their place and whites divided, and deprived progressives of all resources of leadership.

At best, their task would have to be reckoned in years. At worst, it might be smothered almost immediately under a Talmadge reign of terror, which could make Georgia liberals just as helpless as those of Louisiana under Huey Long. In any case, they would make an earnest and courageous try. And if by some unlikely chance they should develop a leader of dramatic, colorful personality—a man cast in the red clay mould with a magical appeal for the common people of Georgia—it is just possible that in the long run they might succeed.