

THE POLL TAX FACT SHEET

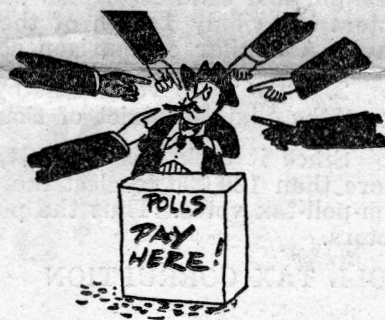
"Ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors of bullets." — Abraham Lincoln

THE POLL TAX is little understood and popularly under-estimated as a constant danger to the American ideals of majority rule, equality before the law for all people, and a republican form of government, and to the framing of a just and lasting peace. Americans deserve to know:



(1) that the poll tax deprives 10,000,000 of their fellow citizens of the fundamental right to vote; (2) that existence of the poll tax discredits us among our friends and allies, weakens our position abroad; (3) that the poll tax stands in the way of our building a sound peace on a foundation of democratic ideals and practices; (4) that the existence of the poll tax, with its direct contribution to legislative irresponsibility, is making our own domestic reconversion from war to peace slower, more difficult, more painful. Ten million disfranchised Americans must be given the right to vote so they, and all of us, can have a voice in building a secure and peaceful America.

THE POLL TAX ISSUE, crucial to the full functioning of American democracy within the framework of our own traditions, and to the future peace of the world, is one about which all Americans should be fully and accurately informed. This Fact Sheet contains basic information to answer, briefly, questions frequently asked about the poll tax. Additional copies are available on request. For further information, write to National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, 127 B Street, S. E., Washington 3, D. C.



"Let every man exercise his just and equal right to vote."—Thomas Jefferson

THE POLL TAX

Before he can vote, an American citizen must pay a poll tax if he lives in any of the following seven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia.

The tax is from one to two dollars a year, and is cumulative for varying periods in three states. After a 24-year lapse, for example, in Alabama, not \$1.50 but \$36 must be paid.



WHY IT LIMITS VOTING

For years, many Southerners living on credit—sharecroppers and company town miners, for example—*have had no cash from year-end to year-end. They cannot vote.*

In an average poll-tax state, the yearly per capita income, even in a war year, did not go higher than \$600.

The poll tax must often be paid in the winter months when farmers and workers have least cash on hand. It must often be paid in person at the court house, a long way over muddy roads. It is due months and months before candidates and issues are announced.

HISTORY

The history of the poll tax is that of an openly admitted campaign in the 1890's and early 1900's to limit the vote. Only Georgia had a poll-tax requirement from earlier times, and Georgia added other vote-limiting provisions during the "period of disfranchisement" from 1889 to 1908. The poll tax was used to keep both Negroes and "poor whites" from voting. The purpose was undisguised.

The effect of the imposition of the poll tax was immediate. Tennessee imposed the tax in 1890. In 1892, the vote was 40,000 less than the vote four years earlier. In Mississippi, the drop was from 117,000 in 1888 to 52,000 in 1892.

THE POLL TAX VOTE

In the 1944 Presidential elections, 19% of the adult population voted in the poll-tax States as against 61% in the non-poll-tax States. In the 1942 Congressional elections, the corresponding figures were 5% to 39%.

This means that four-fifths of the possible voters in the poll-tax States were disfranchised in the most significant election in decades.

Other results of the poll tax were:

1. More votes were cast in 1944 for the 5 Representatives from Connecticut (population 1,748,402) than for 34 Representatives from the entire States of South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, plus five districts of Georgia (total population 9,666,144). Connecticut's voters have only 1/17th of the representation in Congress that the equivalent poll-tax voters have. A similar comparison could be made with the other Northern and Western States.

2. Only 2,905 votes cast by 1.5% of the population *eligible to vote* elected a Congressman from the Sixth District of South Carolina in 1942.

Since it took less than 31,000 votes in 1944 to elect the average poll-tax Congressman, and more than 120,000 to elect the average non-poll-tax Congressman, one poll-tax vote is worth four non-poll-tax votes. Thus the poll tax has the additional effect of disfranchising non-poll-tax voters.

POLL TAX CORRUPTION

The existence of the poll tax means that large sections of the vote are the corrupt purchase of political machines. Relatives and henchmen of political leaders seldom have to pay their own poll tax—it is paid for them. Under the fractional democracy of the poll tax system, patronage goes far. Honest voters feel themselves outweighed. In Virginia, a machine boss can pay a block of 4,000 poll taxes and, if convicted for the offense, pay a fine of only \$5. The payment of a poll tax usually means the purchase of a vote.

POLL TAX CONGRESSMEN

Poll-tax Congressmen have long been largely independent of the people of their States. Some of them are "permanent" politicians, re-elected term after term. In the last 3 elections, the turnover rate among non-poll-tax Representatives has been 98% greater than among poll-taxers. Fourteen poll-tax Congressmen have been in Congress 20 years or more. These veterans become experienced legislative tacticians, experts on rules and methods, past masters of political maneuvering and "log-rolling."

CONTROL OF COMMITTEES

The power of these long-tenure Congressmen is greatly increased by their control of Congressional committees. Seniority determines the rank of committee members. Today poll-tax Senators, because of their long tenure, are chairmen of the Committee on Appropriations, Foreign Relations, District of Columbia, Finance, Immigration, Irrigation and Reclamation, Post-War Economic Policy and Planning. A similar situation exists in the House of Representatives. The Speaker is a poll-tax Representative. A poll-tax Senator, elected by only 28% of the voters of his State, is president *pro tem* of the Senate and acting Vice-President of the United States.

NEGRO AND WHITE

Poll tax repeal has been called a Negro issue. Yet the fact remains that it disfranchises 7 white men to every 3 Negroes. No State has a majority of Negroes in its population.

The poll tax as an economic burden bears down particularly hard on Negroes because they are the poorest. It bears down unfairly on all poor people. Abolition of the poll tax is a precondition for any substantial growth of the vote in the South.

THE SOUTH IN MOTION

It was the people of the poll-tax states themselves who, in 1938, carried the fight for poll-tax repeal to the National Congress. Simultaneously the fight has gone on for repeal in the states. The poll tax is embedded deep in the state constitutions, and in every case state action is hedged about with difficulties. In Alabama, for example, change of the poll-tax requirement in the Constitution calls for a three-fifths vote of both houses of the State legislature, then a vote by the State's "qualified electors," by now about one-tenth of the potential voters. Other states have similar or harder conditions.

In Georgia, through a fortunate combination of circumstances that do not exist in any other state, liberal Governor Ellis Arnall was able to push through repeal of the Georgia poll tax. Senator Lister Hill of Alabama appealed to his state legislature to follow Georgia's example.

Throughout the South today, the demand for the ballot is growing. There are many reasons. The new industrialization of the South has increased Southern cash income. The consequent growth of trade unionism is teaching men to work together. The war has greatly clarified our democratic ideals, and Southerners in uniform who have, with great bravery, helped bring democracy to countries overseas, want it at home, too.



H. R. 7, THE FEDERAL ANTI-POLL TAX BILL

H. R. 7, the bill to abolish the poll tax as a precondition to voting in federal elections, passed the House of Representatives by the overwhelming vote of 251 to 105. It was guided through the House by a bi-partisan coalition headed by Representative-at-Large George H. Bender of Ohio, a Republican. The coalition included 3 Republicans, 5 Democrats, and Representative Marcantonio (ALP, N. Y.), the author of H. R. 7.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

In the Senate, the bill is being guided also by a bi-partisan coalition headed by Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, a Southern Democrat; Senator Homer Ferguson of Michigan, a Republican, and Senator James M. Mead of New York, a Democrat. For the third time, in the present Congress, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, of which all the members are lawyers, recommended that the Senate pass H. R. 7, with a firm assertion of the constitutionality of the federal anti-poll tax bill.

FILIBUSTER IN THE SENATE

A small minority of the Senate, to keep anti-poll tax legislation from coming to a vote, has twice talked and talked until the bill was dropped. If a vote had been taken, the bill would have passed. More than a majority of Senators are pledged to vote for H. R. 7 today.

But again the danger of a filibuster looms large, not only in the fight to abolish the poll tax but in other major legislative issues. America cannot afford minority rule and misrule in the national Congress. The majority has unprecedented responsibility for world welfare, and must have the right to make decisions.

TO LIMIT DEBATE

Once begun, a filibuster can be broken only by invoking the rule of closure (cloture). This simply means limiting further debate to one hour for each Senator, a total of 96 hours if all Senators use their time. It is not a gag rule. And closure is never asked until after everything worth saying has been said.

Moreover, it takes the favorable vote of two-thirds of Senators present to bring the closure rule into operation.

STRATEGY OF THE OPPOSITION

Sometimes Senators who love the immunity of poll tax disfranchisement and who actually oppose the federal anti-poll tax bill because they want to keep the poll tax will give lip service to abolition of the poll tax by some other means. For example, a proposal for a constitutional amendment to abolish the poll tax has been introduced by a sincere opponent of all undemocratic limitations on suffrage. Senator Bilbo has said he would support the constitutional amendment. That is a good clue to its impotence. It would have to pass *both* Houses of Congress by *two-thirds* majority; then it would have to be ratified by *three-fourths* of the states. Thirteen states, merely by failing to act, can block ratification indefinitely.

Enactment of H. R. 7 is simple, swift, and constitutional. The constitutional amendment process is slow, cumbersome, unnecessary. The total effect of the proposed amendment is only to confuse the poll tax issue and divide support in the Senate. The issue is clear and simple: Shall American democracy be allowed to function effectively in the American tradition by passing H. R. 7?

**CLOSURE IS
THIS**



**NOT
THIS**



A publication of
**NATIONAL COMMITTEE
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Write for further information

