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Suffrage in the South

Part I: The Poll Tax

by **GEORGE C. STONEY**

1. MAURY MAVERICK, MAYOR OF SAN ANTONIO, WAS ACQUITTED. They charged him with lending money to union members so they could pay their poll taxes and vote. In Texas, loans and gifts for the payment of poll taxes are against the law. Pushing the charges against Maverick was the "temporarily beaten local political machine, which," according to the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, "is notorious throughout the Southwest."
2. "It was a smart trick," I said, "to pull a thing like this out against the man who has been hailed all over Texas as the white knight of reform."
3. "Uh-huh," grumped one of San Antonio's realistic political observers. "But before you get yourself all worked up in a lather over 'means' and 'ends,' just take a look and see what anybody who gets into Texas politics is up against. It's a duel to the death when you take on one of those old machines, and they choose the weapons. The most powerful, of course, is the poll tax. Paying a poll tax in February to vote in November is to most folks in Texas like buying a ticket to a show nine months ahead of time, and before you know who's playing or really what the thing is all about. It is easy to forget to do, too, and here is where the politicians are obliging. They buy up as many poll tax receipts as they can before the books close, keep them on file and pass them out to their owners' on election day—with instructions, of course, and an extra dollar or so for sweetenin'. There is a law about no person being allowed to pay anybody else's poll tax; but that, like the one about people who don't pay being given road work or a fine, is enforced only when it's convenient."
4. In some parts of Texas the special tax collector, after all "independents" (people who pay their own way) have been collected from, merely buys enough extra slips to

In the South, two thirds of the voting population are barred from the polls by a head tax which is a prerequisite to voting. What this "one third democracy for one sixth of the nation" means to the Democratic party, to the nation, and to the issues of the 1940 elections are revealed in the staggering facts and figures here presented in the first of two articles by a young southern writer.

assure his political machine's victory. In places where two or more personal machines exist within the Democratic party (there is no other worth speaking of in Texas), the collector sells receipts of those known to be "willing" to the highest bidder. Then all the sound and fury before elections is, in part, window-dressing, in part an effort to get the independent vote, and in part an attempt to highjack the other fellow's poll-tax-subsidized voter.

5. There is very little danger of this last happening, however. Each ballot cast in Texas elections has a number on it, a number corresponding to one written beside the voter's name on the registration book.
6. "Of course nobody's supposed to check back on these numbers according to the law," our Texas friend smiled. "but...." (Arkansas, Georgia, Alabama, Missouri and Illinois, a *northern* state, have similar practices.)
7. Although the list of eligible voters is made up from the tax collector's lists, the Constitution "permits" election officers to demand that each voter produce his poll tax receipt. Texas has a large non-English-speaking Mexican population. It has no literacy requirements; the \$1.50 poll tax is supposed to do the necessary sifting. All this election routine involves a very small number of Texans, anyway. When favorite son John Nance Garner was running in 1936, only 26.2 percent of the citizens over twenty-one years of age went to the polls in the general election. Precinct residence requirements make that great block of roaming agricultural workers a voteless one. Since a third of the tenant farmers move each year, they, too, lose their political voice. The rule of the Texas state Democratic party—and remember always the primary is the only important election in the South—refusing membership to Negroes, eliminates another 14 percent entirely. For those who are not a part of 'the machine, the lack of \$1.50, the lack of patience with all this red tape, or just plain apathy, encouraged by disgust at the general situation keeps them away. They think: "My one honest vote won't help matters."
8. The 1938 Democratic primary, largest in the state's history, brought out only 34 percent of the people over twenty-one. That is the extent of democracy in Texas.
9. Maverick is a member of one of the oldest and, for years, one of the most politically potent families in Texas. Besides this, he is a campaigner people will ride in from fifty to a hundred miles out on the prairies to hear. This is how he got elected to Congress the first time. Once he had clearly demonstrated that his liberalism was genuine, the party brought him back home. He won his place in San Antonio because a split in the local machine made it possible for those people who had been completely fed up with San Antonio's reputation as wickedest city" to pile in behind a third man. Maverick was a plurality winner.
10. The present governor, flour-salesman O'Daniel, did not get into office by the usual Texas trail, either. Again taking advantage of a split among political factions, he went after the old people—the people over sixty who do not have to pay a poll tax. He talked, hymned and prayed to them over the radio every Sunday morning at 8:30, and during the rest of the week gave them hill-billy songs and a fairy story about \$30-a-

month pensions.

11. Except for the fact that two such unanointed have gained office, the Texas political situation is remarkably similar to that found all over the South. Less than *one third* of the adults in twelve southern states, that form *one sixth* of the nation, are able to take part in the democratic process.

One Third Democracy

12. IN EACH STATE THE CONTROL IS MANAGED IN A SLIGHTLY different way. There are varieties in race treatment, poll tax levies, and so on, but the results are the same—complete domination by one party and by political cliques.
13. The poll tax is, perhaps, not the main restriction, but it is certainly a major one, and it is one a great many white southerners are determined to do something about. That is why I am describing its workings and the fight being made for its elimination, in such detail. (Next installment will tell of the one party system, Negro disfranchisement and, finally, the way these things affect not only the South but the nation as a whole.)
14. All these franchise limitations have an historical explanation in some measure a justification. And though the Yankees may scoff, it was the "civil war." Details about this must be left until Part II of this article. It is enough to say here that most of these restrictive measures date, not from Reconstruction days in the 1870s, but from the white supremacy conventions that came in the late 1890s and earlier 1900s. During the preceding ten years Negroes and white farmers, combined in the People's Party, all but broke the Democratic political hold in the South; and the openly avowed object of many legislators at these conventions was to keep the vote from all except *white Democrats*.
15. That the quantitative aims of these men have been achieved over the years, no one can question. Take Alabama, for instance. In 1892 the state's total male population of voting age (according to Simon Michelet's report to the Get-Out-the-Vote Club) was 375,000. Its vote for President that same year was 232,516. In 1936 there were 1,348,401 Alabamians of voting age and the state's vote in the general election was 275,794. But let's be completely fair about this thing. Take Alabamians on their own terms: subtract Negro adults and use the Democratic primary as the measure. The number of native white citizens over twenty-one in Alabama in 1936 was 853,028. The vote in the 1936 Democratic white primary (largest ever recorded) was 314,000. Here is a population increase of 40 percent in forty-two years and an increase in voting of barely 14 percent.
16. Or take Virginia as an example. *The Southern Planter*, crusading in that state for poll tax reform, records that in 1896 some 295,000 men voted in the Presidential election, 64 percent of the electorate. In 1936, the total polled in the general election was 334,590. The population has increased meanwhile some 34 percent. Again meeting the state on its own terms, and assuming that all voters are white and even assuming that every person who paid his poll tax *voted* in the *Democratic* primary, we get a top figure of 477,151 or 34 percent of the total adult population. Remember, the figure in

1892 was 64 percent of all males, black and white. West Virginia, with no such deductions, had a voting percentage in 1936 of 92.1.

- 17. In the 1936 general election, 18.5 percent of the citizens of Arkansas cast a ballot. The top figure for that state's white primary only brings the total to 25.2 percent.
- 18. And so it goes with every one of the poll tax states.
- 19. A GOOD MANY PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH—AND THEIR NUMBER is increasing—consider that such "deduction" for disfranchised Negroes is no longer justified. More, they think that voting figures in the one party primary are not an indication of the true state of things. Figures for voting in general elections, therefore, should be taken at their face value as an indication of the amount of democracy the South enjoys. Such outstanding southern suffrage reformists as Brooks Hays, Virginus Dabney and Barry Gingham quote the following figures without apology:

How the Poll Tax Works

Poll tax states

20. EIGHT PEOPLE SITTING ON THE PORCH DOWN IN GREEN Pond, Ala., were talking about the triple-A farm program and the chance Speaker Bankhead has of replacing Garner on the 1940 ticket. Four wrinkled-faced farmers and their faded wives they were. Yes, they went to the Holiness Church, and they had the usual Alabama back; country hatred of the Negro, but they also read the newspapers and they knew what issues were in Congress. In other words, these ordinary Alabama poor whites were politically conscious. As for the chances of their getting into the political game:

Tenn.	33.5 percent
Texas.	26.2
Va.	25.7
Ala.	20.4
Ga.	19.6
Ark.	18.5
Miss.	16.2
S.C.	14.1

Other southern states

La.	29 percent
N.C.	50
Fla.	38
Ky.	64

Some Comparisons

W. Va.	92.1 percent
U.S. Average64

(or an average of about 22 percent—other 40 states about 72 percent.)

21. "We might just as well be outside the fence a-lookin' through a knothole," the oldest one of the eight laughed. Only two of the eight voted—or could vote under Alabama's cumulative poll tax law. These two men had paid their \$1.50 every year. A third had voted until the drought of 1933. With no election that year he saw no reason for putting out \$1.50 he didn't have. Next year \$3 was the price he had to pay to vote, and cotton was selling for 5 cents a pound. He couldn't spare that much. Now a vote for Bankhead in the Democratic primaries next spring will cost him \$11.50. He won't vote. (For men the tax is cumulative from the age of twenty-one. Women pay from the time they first vote. In both cases the first vote is free.)

22. "Lord, that's jus' like me," his wife spoke up. "They drug me out and hauled me down when Bryan was arunnin' in '24. I hadn't voted since. Wonder what they'd charge me now?" We figured it out. It came to \$22.50. "That's as much as I give fer that cook-stove yonder," she answered, "and hit'll last me a heap longer!"
23. In this community of 300 people, only twelve citizens could be named who "had the vote." Of the approximately 25,000 people in that county, only about 2700 voted in the last election. Add to this the fact that each vote has an identification mark that can serve as an absolute check on how people vote, and the further fact that the polling place for this community is the store of the community's big supply merchant who personally supervises elections, and one begins to get a picture of how democracy works in one small corner of the South.
24. Alabama's poll tax is the most severe. Tennessee's calls for a one dollar tax to be paid by all voters between twenty-one and fifty. Most municipalities or counties here levy an additional one dollar tax. This \$2 can be paid within sixty days of election, however, not six to ten months before it as required in Georgia, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia. Virginia charges \$1.50 a year, and all back poll taxes for three years must be paid up, plus interest charges and a fee, before the ballot is restored.
25. Arkansas asks for one dollar, to be paid by June first. If one forgets to "assess" the tax over a year beforehand, however, he is charged an additional dollar penalty. Georgia asks the usual dollar to be "returned" by reporting to the collector early in the spring. The tax itself is to be paid in the fall. For each year one fails to pay the tax, there is a penalty and a collection fee amounting to another dollar and 7 percent interest. Past due poll taxes accumulate and can be collected for seven years back (or up to \$15.50 total) before voting is allowed.
26. It may be significant that in Georgia and Alabama, the two states where the Populist movement was very strong, there are the most severe poll tax laws.
27. Mississippi charges \$2 a year. This must be paid up for at least two years back and must be paid by February first. South Carolina's provision is the most moderate—a one dollar tax paid thirty days before election, it is not cumulative, and is not charged for primary voting; women are exempt entirely. This is the only state where poll taxes do not apply to primaries and probably explains, together with the weakness in South Carolina of the Republican party, why the vote in general elections is so low.

Talking with a Mississippi Judge

28. A SECOND GROUP OF THOSE MEN AT THE WHITE SUPREMACY conventions looked on the poll tax as a guarantee of quality, a guarantee that the "more responsible" people would be in charge of things. Today this same feeling is expressed in the familiar phrase: "If a man doesn't have enough interest in his government to pay a dollar or two for the privilege of voting, he's not worth being a citizen."
29. I heard a prominent Mississippi judge say practically this same thing, and I think he

was completely sincere. This judge has done as much as any one person in Mississippi to make people recognize (the first step to doing something about it) that the income of the average farm family in that state is less than \$100 a year.

30. "Look, judge," I said, "you ask this same man who must support his entire family on \$100 a year, to give up 2 percent of it for the right to cast a ballot, a privilege which he has a hard time connecting with any direct benefits? If this man's wife wants to vote, that means \$2 more—4 percent of the family income. Statistics show that the average Mississippi farm family has a third adult member. If grandfather or an older son wants to vote, that means 6 percent of the family income. Would you say, judge, that interest in the state's government can be fairly measured by such sacrifice? How many families in your economic group would be willing to give up 6 percent of their income for the franchise?"
31. "Farm families in poll tax states try to keep one member's poll tax paid up, to let the whole household have one voice at least. Besides the feeling of belonging it gives, this has a more practical reason behind it. Sheriffs, health officers, school officials and the general courthouse crowd have an ear for a voting family that pays its own tax. Now, judge, if the possession of the \$2 is guarantee of quality voting, are the other adult members of these one-vote-families made naturally inferior by their lack?"
32. There is one new provision in the Mississippi law that is a test of some kind of mental dexterity. To vote, one must present poll tax receipts for two years back, a requirement that disfranchised many forgetful college professors. It almost—the judge admitted—disfranchised him. (The judge is against this law.) The regular followers of either the Bilbo or Harrison machines here do not have to tax their memories. Their receipts are not only bought for them but are kept on file, issued on election day, re-collected and saved for the next year. This law was passed—by the way, in 1932, to replace the old requirement that not only poll taxes but all taxes must be paid up in order to vote. The joker here was that, by 1932, a good many landlords found themselves voteless, sitting on their verandas watching tenants who paid only poll taxes going off to the polls.
33. A powerful argument against the claim that the poll tax acts as a qualitative guarantee for electors is the open admission in every state that a large number, in some cases a majority, of the poll tax receipts are paid for by politicians who hold them and vote them wholesale.
34. Louisiana has no poll tax but it has a similar receipt requirement. It came about in this way. When Huey Long came into power (under the poll tax system, mind you), he found it quite a drain on party resources to pay out such large amounts to the county assessors for poll taxes. So he had the legislators abolish the one dollar tax and, in its place, require people to show poll receipts (given out free by the sheriff) for the two years preceding, in order to cast a ballot. This meant a person must go and, effect, register every year, whether or not there is an election.
35. In the exciting current elections, when, thanks to the presence of FBI men, the Long machine will stand trial before the state in the first real chance intelligent voters in

Louisiana have had to change things, thousands of them will be disqualified because they did not vote in the admittedly farcical and fraudulent elections of last year, or because they have mislaid their poll receipts. Machine controlled voters are spared this trouble. About six o'clock in the evenings during poll receipt time, workers come around to the "receptive" household and sign up all adults. Receipts are kept for issuance on election. This situation must be kept in mind when one asks of the good people of Louisiana: "Why don't you do something about the Long machine?"

36. "Abolishing the poll tax," goes another familiar argument, "would lay state politics open to all sorts of demagoguery and would bring back the terrible conditions of the 1890s." In answer, one can point out the following: Huey Long was elected before Louisiana repealed her tax. "Cotton Ed" Smith and "the man" Bilbo represent poll tax states. Again, in every poll tax state except Virginia, people over sixty (it is forty-five in Alabama and fifty in Tennessee) are exempt from the tax. This leaves the South, which has an unusually large percentage of old folks, open to the nation's most powerful group—the old age pensioners.
37. The enemies of the poll tax are not all people who want the suffrage extended numerically. In fact, many of the leaders in the fight might be on the other side if the tax did what the originators claimed it would: namely, restrict voting to the more intelligent and "respectable" citizens. In practice they see the poll tax playing directly into the hands of the politicians. People who do not have money for the poll tax, and who have no scruples about accepting a bought receipt, can vote, quality or not. Those who are too poor to pay for their own, and who have too much integrity to let someone buy the receipt for them, stay at home, voteless. A great mass of disfranchised people of whatever mentality are virtually "on tap" for the politician. He can vote as many of them as he needs to maintain control. Honest ballot people are working for an educational qualification to replace the poll tax, one to be administered by school rather than election officials.

Defending the Poll Tax

38. THAT THIS CONTROL BY THE POLL TAX IS AN ACTUALITY, ITS advocates defend rather than deny. In support of the tax they offer two further arguments: first, the poll tax benefits the schools; second, if the poll tax were lifted, Negroes would again be an important factor in southern politics. That both of these arguments are completely hollow makes them no less effective.
39. Most southerners are very sensitive about the poor ratings their educational systems have. Though a larger proportion of the income is allotted for education in the South than in most northern states, the total income is pitifully small. By giving money raised through poll taxes to education, the tuitions have anchored it into the very heart of the South's progressive people. Yet the poll tax, as a revenue producer, is a flop. The only place where it produces any significant amount is in New England, where it is not a requisite for voting but is levied on all adults as a regular system of taxation.
40. Virginia collects about \$700,000 annually by the poll tax.

41. Only those who vote are required to pay. Maine, with a population about a third the size, collects as much. Here the tax is levied on all alike. Arkansas raises only 5 percent of her total school budget by the poll tax, a tax that keeps a good 80 percent of her adult citizens from voting. The more forward-looking educators are urging that the poll tax be not entirely abolished. Instead of making it a requisite for voting and collected by a special assessor, they say, let it be included in the regular tax program and levied on all citizens. This would not only increase the yield to schools, they show, but also would allow the ballot to a group likely to press for increased appropriations for education. Perhaps it is this very thing that the poll tax supporters fear most.
42. Now to the second argument: that, if the poll tax is lifted: "it would give the Negro the vote. An editorial in the "Tuscaloosa (Alabama) News for November 3 states it plainly:
- "This newspaper believes in white supremacy, and it believes that the poll tax is one of the essentials for the preservation of white supremacy. It does not believe in a democracy with a small "d," because it knows this country never has had such a democracy and never will have such a democracy as long as white supremacy is preserved.... If it is "undemocratic" to argue for white supremacy—as it certainly is—then we plead guilty to the charge.... "*
43. Whether or not one thinks it a good thing, the fact that "poll tax defenders find the threatened loss of white supremacy "their most powerful argument, demands that it be analyzed, and analyzed in southern terms.
44. Since 1901, the percentage of Negroes in all southern states has declined from 38.1 to 29.8. According to the 1930 census, only Mississippi has a majority of Negroes, and the new census will probably show this changed. There are counties and districts where Negroes are in a majority, but the white primary, manipulation of the literacy tests, and keep all but a handful of Negroes away from the polls. In Arkansas, where the threat helped defeat poll tax reform, not a single congressional district has a majority of Negroes. The percentage for the state as a whole is 25. In Louisiana, where the poll tax is not required, less than one percent of the Negroes vote. Only a few more use the ballot in North Carolina, where the tax payment is not a prerequisite. Despite the fact that 18,000 Negroes are included in Alabama's blanket exemption of World War veterans (another direct opening to a powerful pressure group), only about 1500 Negroes in the whole state cast a ballot in 1936.
45. The "Democratic white primary"—the rule of the several state parties that no man of color can vote in a party election—is enforced rigidly in all southern states except Kentucky, Tennessee and a few counties of Virginia and North Carolina.

Ready for Action

46. FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, ARTICLES HAVE BEEN APPEARING IN national publications telling of the tremendous fights going on in these states on the poll tax and prophesying early victory.

47. And the results? Just about plain zero.
48. Poll taxes have been lifted in two states since the big fight began, Louisiana and Florida. Neither of these actions, however, can be called anything but straight party politics. In Louisiana, as we have seen, the tax was lifted because the political machine had such a stranglehold on the state it did not need this rather expensive device for control. In Florida, the levy was raised because the group that had control in the legislature (loosely the "New Dealers") were in danger of losing their power. Back-home politicians who handed out the poll tax slips did not like the way their leader, Senator Pepper, was acting in Congress. Seeing defeat if they went to election under the old system, the Pepper people staked their fate on the rousing power of the New Deal, repealed the levy, and rode back into power with plenty of room to spare.
49. Worthy of note—in both these cases is the immediate increase in voting. In Louisiana, despite the poll receipt business and the general apathy because of the Long machine domination, there was an increase of 36.5 percent in the number of registered voters. In Florida, the vote in the special election for Pepper jumped 65,000 and in the next regular Democratic primary the number of voters doubled!
50. Though the anti-poll taxers cannot claim these as victories, they can point to them as proof of the fact that people will vote if they are given a chance.
51. In Arkansas, the anti-poll-tax fighters used all this new proof in the recent campaign to have an amendment to the state constitution repealing the tax submitted to the people. Friends of repeal say that the whole procedure was directed, not toward getting a true test of public sentiment on the question but toward killing agitation for this reform once and for all. The amendment was drawn so that opponents had little trouble picking flaws in it.
52. After thus setting the stage, the question was smothered. No word about it in the papers; candidates for office in the Democratic primary in August would not speak on it. The question was left to be argued out in the two months between this and the general election—and, remember, only the political "regulars" are accustomed to voting in Arkansas' general elections. The committee advocating the reform was headed by a liberal Little Rock lawyer named Roy Prewitt. Mrs. C. E. Hefner and Brooks Hays, Democratic committee members, and a goodly assortment of clubwomen, church liberals, and so forth, were assistants. The organizations supporting it, the state AF of L, the Railway Trainmen, the Farmers' Union, are not very strong in Arkansas and they had no money to put into the campaign.
53. Lined up against them in solid phalanx were the politicians. Flanking these were the plantation owners who knew that an increased vote in their counties would lead to more taxes for roads, schools and public welfare.
54. One argument was whispered: "Do you want to see niggers in the state capital with their feet on the desk?"
55. The opposition had no money to tell people how false these arguments were. Not a

cent was available for literature, gasgab broadcasts—all the indispensables to effective last-minute campaigning. The amendment was defeated, two to one. And more results: swift reprisals in the form of lost jobs, ruined businesses, and the like, against the leaders of movement.

56. With the growth of the labor movement in southwest Kansas, reformists hope enough signatures can be gained to have a second voting on the issue in 1940. But the Arkansas experience illustrates the kind of opposition repealists are up against in the rest of the poll tax states.
57. Except for the help of the Alabama Policy Committee through its vigorous member, Charles W. Edwards, and, lay, the help of the two labor groups, Alabama's anti-poll tax fight has been carried on chiefly by women. This is dominant. Women in the South can defy the Negro domination threat without loss of gallantry, and they are less in danger of economic reprisals. [See *Ladies and Lynchings, Survey Graphic*, November 1939.] For several years, the Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the Business and Professional Women's Clubs have had the removal of the poll tax as the abolition of the identified ballot included on their legislative program. The two groups were in no small part responsible for the fact that the governor included these two in his campaign platform. Not satisfied with the (they knew politics), these women sought out the leaders of other organizations included in the powerful Women's Joint Legislative Council, and formed a special subcommittee on poll tax reform. The appeal these women made to the organization members was unanswerable.
58. "This movement will strengthen the legislative power of your own organization." A survey of their own membership revealed the following percentages of voting members:
- | | | |
|--|--|------------|
| | Federated Farm Women | 16 percent |
| | Federated Women's Clubs. | 25—30 |
| | Ala. Methodist Missionary Societies. | 30 |
| | Parent Teachers Association. | 25—30 |
| | Business and Professional Women | 80 |
59. Finally, seven statewide women's organizations, with a combined membership of 150,000, put their force into the movement. Leadership was taken by Mrs. Albert Thomas, a legislative chairman of the Congress of Parents and Teachers. Mrs. Thomas' press releases were masterpieces of southern feminine appeal. When the legislature convened, a press campaign was organized complete with telegrams, postcards and radio speeches.
60. When the matter came up for debate, the governor silent. The measures' "friends" on the floor promptly killed it. Discouraged but not beaten by their betrayal, Mrs. Thomas and her 150,000 women are now going further into "grass roots" for support.
61. Things look brighter for repeal in Tennessee. It will undoubtedly be a major issue in the 1940 campaign. Remembering how Governor Prentice Cooper campaigned for abolition in 1936 and did nothing when the measure was for consideration afterwards, however, repealists are too cocky. Both factions of the Democratic party in year,

under the prodding of the Tennessee League of Women Voters, pledged themselves to abolition. Once the legislature convened, however, enthusiasm for repeal waned. Politicians began to realize it would abolish control of election held through purchase of poll taxes.

62. Word came down the line that both the resolution asking for abolition of the poll tax by constitutional amendment and its companion bill, granting a maximum reduction pending abolition, both sponsored by the league, must never reach the floor of the legislature for a vote. Despite the support given these measures by most of the state's newspapers, despite campaigning in its behalf by groups numbering over 500,000 members, organized by Mrs. Carl V. Stafford and Mrs. H. D. Blakely of the league, the politicians won out.
63. "Can we expect politicians who owe their election to the manipulation of the poll tax to work for its elimination?" some of these campaigners are now asking themselves.
64. That same question is asked in Virginia, too, where, despite the work of many women, farm and labor organizations, and the powerful editorial support of *The Southern Planter* and the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, nothing has been done. This is what people in Texas are wondering, where the present governor and many legislators, elected on a "no poll tax" platform, have forgotten their promise. This is what people in Georgia and Mississippi are wondering, where political domination and the manufactured scare of foreign domination is so great that even women's organizations dare not make an active campaign.

Appomattox in Reverse

65. DISCOURAGED BY THE RECORD OF COMPLETE DEFEATS SCORED IN several states, one southwide organization, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, having suffrage reform as a part of its program, has instituted a different attack on the problem. A suit has been filed under its sponsorship by a Tennessee mountaineer against a registrar who refused to allow him the right to vote in a special congressional election because he had not paid the poll tax. Judge Elmer Davies ruled against the plaintiff in its first test, and it now awaits trial before the circuit court of appeals. Eventually will act as a Supreme Court test for the constitutionality of charging a poll tax to vote for federal officers. A decision has been handed down by the Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of the poll tax for state elections. This time the case is being limited to the tax in federal elections only.
66. The second front of attack being used by the Southern Conference is H.R. 7534, a direct appeal to Congress to declare the poll tax illegal in all general elections for Presidents and for congressmen. This bill was introduced at the request of the conference during the last few days of the last session by Congressman Geyer of California.
67. The southern politicians at whom the bill is aimed are already raising their twin confederate war cries: "states rights" and "Yankee domination." An undertone of disapproval from the more conservative anti-poll-tax leaders can be heard, too. They

fear that, with the charges of "Yankee domination" added to the dangerous Negro issue, movements within the states themselves will be greatly weakened.

68. In any event, advocates of poll tax reform do not look on its achievement as a panacea for the present unhealthy condition of the South's democracy. Should their campaign be successful, one-party domination, Negro disfranchisement, and other limitations on suffrage to be discussed in Part II of this article, will remain. The results of 1940s elections, however, may register this condition in such a fashion as to startle southern politicians themselves into doing away with the most unpopular of their undemocratic controls—the poll tax.