

NY

Hollings Fight on Hunger Is Stirring the South

By MARJORIE HUNTER

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WASHINGTON, March 7—A few months before his death, Senator Robert F. Kennedy passed the word that he was thinking of touring hunger pockets in South Carolina.

His friend Senator Ernest F. Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, quickly took him aside.

"For the Lord's sake, don't," Senator Hollings pleaded. "You'll set us back 10 years. I'm already working on this."

It was no idle promise. Last month, Senator Hollings appeared before a special Senate committee and said quietly:

"There is hunger in South Carolina. There is substantial hunger. I have seen it with my own eyes."

To many startled liberals here perhaps, was a new voice from the South, a dynamic young politician destroying once and for all the old myths as he described the stark poverty that he and other Southerners had seen and smelled for a lifetime but had been loath to admit.

In a South beset with racial troubles, championing the cause of the poor, particularly the black poor, might seem politically risky.

Flocking to the G.O.P.

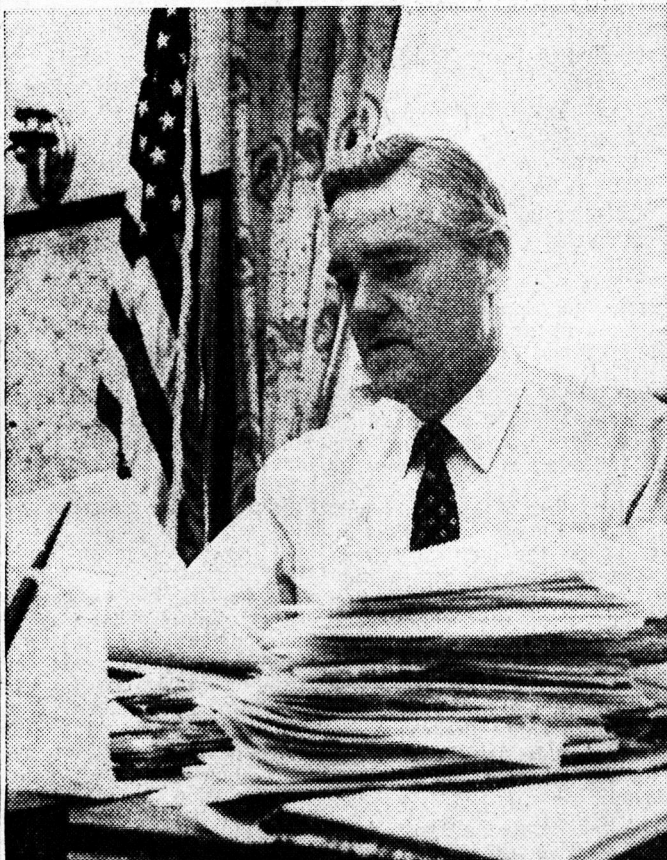
Furthermore, angered by what they consider Federal meddling over civil rights and handouts to the lazy, many conservative Democrats have flocked to the Republican party in areas of the South where, scarcely a few years ago, the word Republican was akin to sin.

Why, then, did Mr. Hollings do it? Was he angling for the Vice-Presidential nomination in 1972? Was he headline hungry? Had he fallen under the influence of his Democratic neighbor across the hall in the old Senate Office Building, Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts?

Until recently, there had been little in the 47-year-old Mr. Hollings's record as a Senator to suggest that he would one day attempt to lead a crusade against hunger.

He had been considered a reasonably moderate Southern Governor (1958-63), attracting new industry to his state, increasing teacher salaries and imploring compliance with desegregation orders.

He had been one of a small handful of young Southern politicians who supported John F. Kennedy's bid for the Presidential nomination—a move that he believes cost him a Sen-



The New York Times (by George Tames)

Ernest F. Hollings, Democratic Senator from South Carolina, at his office in Washington. He reads some of the mail he has received after his report on hunger in home state.

ate seat in the 1962 election.

But finally elected to the Senate in 1966 to fill a two-year unexpired term, he became virtually indistinguishable from his arch-conservative Southern colleagues, both Democratic and Republican.

He voted against civil rights bills and many social welfare programs and he spoke out for sharp cuts in Federal spending. He opposed the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first Negro Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

But the shedding of his conservative image this year may prove to have been more politically astute than politically risky, for the South of today is far different from the South of a few years ago.

New industries have brought in Northerners. There are plush resorts and military reservations. And the Negro has become a major source of votes, making up nearly 25 per cent of the electorate in South Carolina alone.

Some measure of this change can be seen in the thousands of letters and telegrams that

have flooded into Senator Hollings's office in recent weeks. The vast majority are favorable.

"You've made me proud to be a Southerner," one South Carolinian wrote.

This theme—pride in a new South, in a seemingly new kind of Southern politician—is echoed again and again, in letters from those still living there and those who long ago fled in what many of them plaintively described as "utter frustration."

"For years I have regarded you as a handsome young Southerner, getting his kicks from playing politics," wrote a North Carolina businessman. "You now reveal yourself as a true nobleman."

"Be assured, Senator," a young South Carolinian wrote, "there is a rising class of new Southerners."

And from a Virginian came a letter: "My only regret is that a Virginia Senator has not said what you have said."

Many Southerners sent carbon copies of their letters to their own Senators. Already,

Senator Herman E. Talmadge, Democrat of Georgia, has indicated he will begin a hunger crusade in his own state. Other Senators have hinted that they may do the same.

To those who speculate aloud over his motives, Senator Hollings has a stock reply. He is doing it, he says, because for the first time he feels free to do it.

"Thank the Lord for a six-year term!" he said fervently, leaning back in a big leather chair in his cluttered fourth-floor office.

As Governor, he said, he concentrated on getting more jobs for those able to work. And during his two-year Senate term he always had his eye on re-election.

"If I'd done this then, folks would have said, 'Oh, he's just politicking,'" he said wryly. "They'd thought it was just part of the campaign."

But, re-elected last November to his first six-year term, he now feels he has time "to stay around for a while and get some things done."

Once as critical of Supreme Court decisions and Washington "handouts" as many of his Southern colleagues, he now says impatiently:

"I can't stand around hollering about the Constitution and cussing Washington with hungry mouths all around us. Frankly, I'm tired of hearing me on the Constitution."

He stanchly denies that he is eyeing the Vice-Presidential nomination in 1972.

"I've got my hands full," he says. "I don't know of a Southern political leader who could handle anything more than the problems of his own state. We've got a lot of work to do."

Has Taken Some Ribbing

He has taken some ribbing in recent weeks, both in his home state and among Senate colleagues. Some call him "Hookworm Hollings." And he has a few letters from angry South Carolinians threatening to "get him" during the next election.

"I give you the back of my hand for being a big phoney," wrote one. "Bah, humbug on you and all your kind."

But the critics, those who usually are the first to write, are in the minority. Less than 5 per cent of the thousands of letters Senator Hollings has received on the subject of hunger have been critical of him. Many, however, have been critical of his South Carolina colleague, Senator Strom Thurmond, an erstwhile Democrat turned Republican.