

### THE VOTE FOR 18-YEAR-OLDS<sup>1</sup>

In less than a month, on April 4th, New York's ninth Constitutional Convention in 190 years will convene to consider the revision and modernization of our State's fundamental charter of government. One of the crucial issues it will face is whether Article II, Section I of the Constitution, which fixes the minimum voting age for New Yorkers at twenty-one should be amended to reduce the age requirement to eighteen.

The question is not new—but it is current. Senator Mansfield recently introduced a Constitutional amendment to reduce the voting age at the national level to eighteen. The resolution is co-sponsored by Senator Dirksen, myself, and thirty-three other Senators. I have long supported such an amendment at the federal level. I intend to actively support and urge its adoption on the State level at the forthcoming State Convention. It has been proposed, debated, and, unfortunately, rejected for about as long as I can remember. With each year a greater number of citizens enter the age group eighteen through twenty. They are unable to vote—but paradoxically, each year a greater proportion of these same citizens are qualified by education and exposure to political affairs to exercise the privilege of voting intelligently. And each year, I would add, these citizens are more directly involved and affected by government policies enacted by legislators whom they have no say in selecting. Vietnam, civil rights, selective service, and educational standards are areas that come immediately to mind.

<sup>1</sup> Remarks of Senator Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) at Hunter College, New York City, March 6, 1967.

The impact of student statements and orderly student demonstrations has been considerable. But still more important, it has been generally responsible. It is an historical fact that the civil rights movement started with student demonstrations. It was the freedom rides of 1960, the sit-ins of 1961 and the marches and voter registration drives of the past five years—all manned by students—which focused national attention on the plight of the Southern Negro. Washington and the Nation have been informed, affected, and influenced by the responsible leadership of youth, but responsibility is a two-way street, and when those in the eighteen through twenty-one age group have shown—as they have—that they are sufficiently responsible to exercise the highest privilege of citizenship with intelligence it becomes the government's duty to see that the privilege is not denied them.

When our first State Constitution was adopted in 1777, males of "full age" were given the right to vote. At the Conventions of 1867 and 1894, proposals were made to reduce the voting age to eighteen. They were defeated. The issue, however, was not considered by the Conventions of 1915 or 1938 and it is now time to reconsider the meaning of "full age" in terms of 1967.

A few statistics will put the scope and nature of the issue in its proper perspective. There are approximately 900,000 New Yorkers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Nationally, there are ten million people in the same age group. Approximately seventy million votes were cast in the 1964 Presidential election—so we are now talking about a group which potentially