

NALC to help commemorate Selma-to-Montgomery 50th anniversary

All eyes will turn to Alabama this month as the nation commemorates the 50th anniversary of the historic Selma to Montgomery civil right march of 1965. NALC members and leaders are making preparations to be on hand for special events in conjunction with our sister unions within the AFL-CIO.

For those who aren't old enough to remember or didn't learn about the events in school, the Selma march was one of the pivotal moments in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. African-Americans in the South faced tremendous difficulties trying to register to vote, even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which legally ended segregation.

Activists in Selma, AL, attempted to organize a voter registration campaign, but white officials refused to budge, forcing African-Americans to pay a poll tax or pass a test before allowing them to register to vote. Eventually the activists invited the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to help them.

Local and regional protests ensued, leading to the death of activist and deacon Jimmie Lee Jackson, who was shot by a state trooper during a peaceful march. SCLC Director of Direct Action James Bevel, who was running SCLC's Selma Voting Rights Movement, called for a protest march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery.

The first march took place without King on March 7, 1965, but ended quickly when 600 marchers were attacked at the Edmund Pettus Bridge after leaving Selma. It became known as "Bloody Sunday" for the viciousness of attacks on the



Martin Luther King Jr. led the historic protest march from Selma to Montgomery, AL, in 1965 to raise awareness for the need for federal protection for fair voter registration.

unarmed marchers by state troopers and others.

King led a second march on March 9 but turned back when troopers seemed to step aside to let them pass. King said that the marchers needed federal protection for the long march. That night, a white group killed James Reeb, a Unitarian Universalist minister from Boston, who had come to march.

The violence surrounding "Bloody Sunday" led to a national outcry. King and others demanded protection for the Selma marchers and a new federal voting rights law to enable African-Americans to register and vote without harassment.

(President Lyndon Johnson went to Congress seeking just such a bill, which became the Voting Rights Act of 1965.)

Eventually receiving federal protection in the form of Army soldiers and the Alabama National Guard, the marchers departed on March 21 along U.S. Route 80. They arrived at the Alabama State Capitol on March 25 with a crowd of 25,000 people to demand voting rights.

The route has been memorialized as the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights Trail and is a U.S. National Historic Trail.

Look for coverage of the events in a future issue of *The Postal Record*. **PR**