

No Way To Get 'Respect For Law'

The tougher penalties rushed through the state House for trespass violations and contempt of court won't end racial protest demonstration in North Carolina.

If anything, final passage of these bills now could make a bad situation worse. They would fortify the Negro's belief that the levers of public power are set against him and his only effective response is through extra-legal protest demonstrations.

For clearly these tough new penalties are directed at Negroes. They are not proposed as remedies for a general weakness in the penalty provisions. And they have had little consideration except in the light of the legislators' own annoyance over the extension of protest demonstrations to the hotel which serves as a Raleigh home for so many of them.

Hurried legislation produced against such a background is rarely wise legislation. And there is no lack

of general objections to the results in this case.

As one legislator pointed out, the new contempt penalty would mean that even a justice of the peace could sentence a person to one year in prison without a jury trial and without the opportunity for appeal.

It would be dangerous folly for North Carolina to legalize such excessive punishment for minor offenses. It would be folly, too, to think tough penalties would end the demonstrations.

The threat of added months in jail might thin the ranks of the demonstrators. But class legislation of this sort won't reduce the "disrespect for the law" that one legislator cited as the reason for seeking longer jail terms and heavier fines.

On the contrary, legislation of this sort would encourage "disrespect for the law" and make the conclusion of North Carolina's protest demonstrations that much harder to reach.