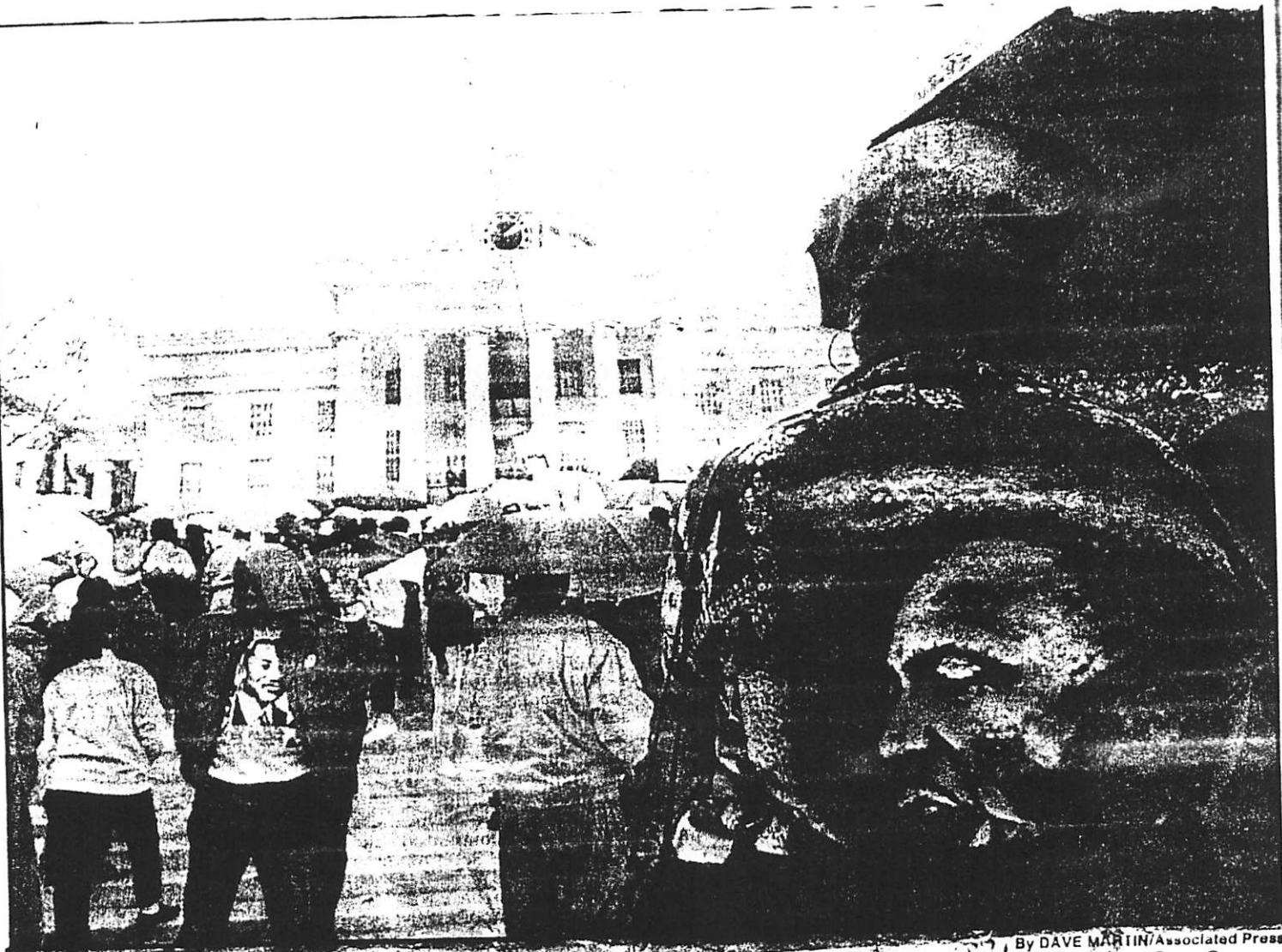




By DAVE MARTIN/Associated Press

Crowds gather for a rally Monday on the steps of the Alabama Capitol to honor King; several speakers called on Gov. Guy Hunt to end his attempt to fly the Confederate Battle Flag atop the Capitol

Celebration for King calls up dreams of economic possibilities

By TONYA JAMESON
Staff Writer

The quest for economic opportunities for Montgomery's black community echoed as the new dream during local celebrations of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

The issue of dismal economic opportunities in the black community sounded from the pulpit of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church to the steps of the Alabama Capitol.

The church held a unity service to spiritually commemorate their slain pastor. During the service, the Rev. Dr. Andrew Turnipseed, a guest speaker from Ramer, addressed the issue of Alabama's need for tax reform and America's need for better health care.

"It's time the politicians realize that in Alabama there is already a union between all the people who suffer," the Rev. Dr. Turnipseed said.

A steady rainfall did not deter bands, organizations or spectators from uniting to march to the Capitol to commemorate the national and state holiday for the Rev. Dr.

King and celebrate the removal of the Confederate Battle Flag.

"For the first time since we have had marches on the state Capitol the Confederate Flag did not fly," said state Rep. Alvin Holmes, D-Montgomery. Rep. Holmes is chairman of Montgomery's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Commemoration.

Although those at a rally following the march rejoiced in the flag victory, emphasis on the condition of the black community's economy provoked words of support instead of rousing cheers.

"The struggle today is no longer a social issue, but it is an economic issue," Rep. Holmes said. "Our thrust for the new year is carrying the Martin Luther King dream forward with jobs and economics."

Montgomery lawyer Johnny Hardwick said the marchers' attendance despite the rainfall was symbolic because it reinforced the effort to remove drags from and bring jobs to the black community.

"We challenge the Clinton administration to live up to its promise and reunite America," Mr. Hardwick said.

Marchers also saluted the commemoration's grand marshals, Idessa Redden and Zecoy Williams.

Ms. Redden helped bring federal registrars to Alabama to oversee voter registration during the civil rights movement, said Gwen Patton, commemoration coordinator. Ms. Williams was one of the movement's earliest financial contributors.

The church service featured speakers and performers, but it highlighted Montgomery's black youth. Loveless and South-lawn elementary school choirs combined for two musical selections. The church's youth performed "The Death of Martin Luther King Jr.," a depiction of the civil rights leader's struggle to promote peace and equality.

Prattville's youth also displayed their talent during the holiday.

Dozens of people lined Main Street for the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parade in Prattville. The parade featured decorated cars, a float and a high school band. A ceremony at First Baptist Church followed. The Autauga County Democratic Conference sponsored the observance.