

CONGRESSIONAL CHALLENGE PROGRESS REPORT

I. BACKGROUND ON THE CONGRESSIONAL CHALLENGE

As the world knows by now, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is now attempting to unseat the five congressmen-elect of Mississippi. The MFDP claims that they were illegally elected because Negroes were not allowed to register and vote.

On January 4, 1965, hundreds of Negroes from Mississippi went to Washington, D. C. for the opening day of Congress. On that day 148 Congressmen voted against the seating of the Mississippi Congressmen. Although these were not enough votes to immediately unseat the Congressmen. There were more votes than anyone expected and it was recognized that this Challenge was a very serious affair!

II. THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY PROVES ITS POINT

Federal laws granted the MFDP the right to prove its case by taking 40 days of testimony beginning on January 4 and ending on February 13. During that time over 700 people from more than 40 counties in Mississippi got a chance to tell their own story publically. People spoke of beatings, bombings, jailings, unfair treatment by public officials such as registrars, sheriffs, highway patrolmen, etc. They told of losing their jobs, being cut off welfare. Much of this happened because people had attempted to register to vote and much of it served to frighten people from ever attempting to register to vote.

Under the same federal law the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party subpoenaed "unfriendly" witnesses like county registrars; sheriffs; highway patrolmen; high-ranking state officials such as the attorney general and secretary of state; the head of the State Sovereignty Commission; former governor Ross Barnett; the top members of the White Citizens Council; and even a few plantation owners.

Under subpoenas served by the MFDP they were questioned publically and thoroughly in front of the people who were accusing them.

Over a hundred lawyers from all over the country assisted in taking these depositions.

Thousands of people in Mississippi went to the depositions and heard their story told publically and honestly for the first time.

People all over the country knew about the hearings and many groups have been helping to support the Mississippi Congressional Challenge since then.

These depositions have been typed up and add up to over 30,000 pages of testimony--and are now being submitted to Congress.

III. WHAT IS THE OTHER SIDE DOING?

The opposition also had 40 days to take depositions to present their side of the case. They didn't hold any depositions at all. What does this mean to the MFDP? Why did they choose to remain silent? Didn't they have a case to present?

Although no depositions were taken by lawyers representing the five Mississippi Congressmen-elect whose seats are being challenged, other officials did not remain entirely silent during this time.

The newspapers have been full of statements by Governor Johnson and other state officials claiming that Mississippi is changing.

During the very same time that these officials have been saying that Mississippi has changed, many other things have continued to happen in

the state. A few examples are: The Freedom School in Indianola was burned down; the Freedom House in Laurel was shot into on the night depositions were held and a few weeks later it was burned down; Mrs. Aynne Quinn, Pike County FDP chairman, was beaten by highway patrolmen after being arrested at a Freedom Day at the Magnolia courthouse.

Does this really look like a new Mississippi? What is the meaning of Governor Johnson's attempt to make the world believe that Mississippi has changed? What does this "new image" of Mississippi mean to the MFDP and how will it affect the Congressional Challenge? Who will the Congress and the President of the U.S. believe? Who will the rest of the country believe?

IV. VOTING LEGISLATION AND THE CONGRESSIONAL CHALLENGE

Right in the middle of the Congressional Challenge and in the midst of the dramatic action being taken in Alabama, President Johnson made a decision--a political decision. He decided to introduce new voting legislation. He says that the purpose of this bill is to ensure everyone the right to register and vote. It is especially directed at changing the conditions in the South where Negroes have been long denied this right.

What does this voting legislation mean to people in the MFDP? Certainly the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party has been working for the right of all people to register and vote. The MFDP is also working for the right of all people to participate politically and to be given a real choice when they can vote. That is why people are running as MFDP candidates in the state now.

But why has President Johnson waited to ask for this legislation until this year while under pressure of the actions in Alabama? Why did he ask for it right in the middle of the Congressional Challenge? Does he hope that this will quiet everyone down in the Civil Rights Movement? Do you think that we should quiet down at this time?

How can the President best prove that he means what he said in his speech to Congress about the new voting bill? Will he go along with Governor Johnson's claim that Mississippi has a "new image?" Or will he prove by action that he means what he said and help unseat the present Mississippi congressmen who were illegally elected?

V. NEW ACTION FOR THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

What must the MFDP continue to do to see that the Congressional Challenge is successful and that we have Free and Open elections in 1965?

Mrs. Victoria Gray, FDP congresswoman, testified on Thursday, March 25, 1965, before the House Judiciary Committee demanding Free Elections in 1965. The only way that this will can be meaningful is if this demand is met. Action of all sorts must be planned by the MFDP to support the Challenge and to demand the voting legislation really means Free Elections in 1965.

VI. IMPORTANT STATE-WIDE HEARINGS AND WORKSHOPS IN JACKSON

The MFDP now has 10 more days to take depositions from people of Mississippi to tell their story and try to disprove the "new image." People from all over will give testimony in state-wide hearings to be held in Jackson, Mississippi. These hearings will start Thursday morning, April 1 through Sunday, April 4. Public depositions will be given on all incidents that have happened in the state just since the Challenge has begun. On Saturday, April 1, the three FDP Congresswomen, Mrs. Annie

Devine, Mrs. Victoria Gray, and Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and the chairman of the FDP executive committee, Lawrence Guyot, will give their testimony.

It is very important that as many people as possible come to these hearings. Try to come and tell everyone you know about the Jackson hearings to be held Thursday, April 1 through Sunday, April 4.

Many people throughout the country are very concerned about the MFDP and the Congressional Challenge. This is especially true of Negroes living in other Southern states.

Several Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party People went to Alabama during the recent demonstrations and spoke to people about FDP, the Challenge, and the demands for Free Elections. Many of these people active in the Movement in Alabama are planning to come to the Jackson state-wide hearings to learn more about the MFDP. People have also been invited from Georgia, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

These are the very last depositions the MFDP can take for the Challenge. It is very important that people from Mississippi be at these hearings!

Every evening after the hearings workshops will be held. At this time plans can be discussed for new action to be taken by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

People in the MFDP State Office are now attempting to secure housing for hundreds of people expected in Jackson for the hearings. Realizing the difficulty of this task they have asked people who marched to Montgomery to bring a large supply of air mattresses and sleeping bags. Many of us then must be prepared to sleep on the ground like they did in Selma, if necessary.

People should try to bring their own blankets and food baskets to share with those who might not have any food.

 * ATTEND *
 * STATE - WIDE HEARINGS *
 * MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY *
 * THURSDAY APRIL 1ST - *
 * SUNDAY APRIL 4TH *
 * GIANT RALLY ON SUNDAY!! *
 * WORKSHOPS EVERY EVENING *
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WHAT YOU MUST DO

If you want to hear the true story of Mississippi told by those who are fighting to change it....If you are really interested in the future of the MFDP....If you are willing to plan and work for new action to ensure Free and Open elections in 1965...ATTEND THE MFDP STATE-WIDE HEARINGS IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, APRIL 1-4 IN THE MASONIC TEMPLE at 1072 Lynch Street.

URGE EVERYONE ELSE TO ATTEND TOO!