

Cong. Challenge

July 9, 1964

Bob Moses

Dear Bob,

Enclosed is a section from the Congressional Record dealing with the appointment of a special committee to investigate campaign expenditures. This is the committee before which we must bring any complaint with respect to the seating of the Mississippi Congressmen. I have had Tillow and Miriam make enquiries in Washington today, and we learn that Speaker McCormack has not yet appointed the members of the committee. You'll note from the Record that in previous years the membership of the committee appears to have been universally right-wing. The committee, so far as I know, has never functioned under McCormack. I'm not sure that McCormack would be more likely to appoint liberals than was Rayburn, but it seems to me there's a chance. In any case, I think you should get in touch (presumably by letter) with Reuther and call his attention to the fact that the committee is likely to be appointed shortly after the House reconvenes on July 20th and point out to him how important it is for us to have at least one or two decent members on the committee. If we could pull this off, we'd be more or less assured of a minority report in our favor. The special committee, as I understand it, reports to a subcommittee (Elections) of the House Administration Committee. The subcommittee is composed of the most incredible array of bastards: The democrats are: Abbitt of Virginia; Waggoner of Louisiana; Perkins of Kentucky and Gibbons of Florida. The Republicans are: Chamberlain of Michigan, Goodell of New York, Curtin of Pennsylvania and Devine of Ohio. Three of the four democrats voted against the civil rights bill both times. The other demo, Perkins of KY. voted for the c.r. bill both times. He has an ADA quotient of 75, which is highest in Ky. He's the only non-complete-bastard among the demo's (and I'm aware the ADA rating doesn't tell much—but it's all I've got that tells anything at all.) All four of the republicans voted for the c.r. bill both times. However, Chamberlain has a 0 ADA rating; Goodell has an 18; Curtin has a 25; and Devine has an 8. Thus the subcommittee which will be handling the report of the special committee doesn't offer much hope. The only real glimmer is that the republicans, fascists that they are, apparently felt it necessary to vote for the c.r. bill, and therefore, might find it necessary to lean our way a bit. If Perkins joined them, we'd have a majority on ~~the~~ the subcommittee. All this, of course, is highly speculative. But these special committees in the past have indicated that republicans on them are not at all reluctant to embarrass democrats about racism in the south, even though the republicans are extreme conservatives on everything else. Of course, the experience I'm referring to here is on the investigating special committee, rather than on the recommendatory subcommittee. But, as I said, it's a line of speculation.

The subcommittee's report would go to the full House administration committee.

Here's how its membership lined up on the c.r. bill and on the ADA ratings:  
(\*means voted for c.r., -means voted against)

Democrats

Burleson, Texas - 17  
Fitzdel, Md., \* 83  
Ashmore, S.C., \* 8  
Hays, Ohio, \* 92  
Jones, Mo., - 20  
Thompson, N.J., \* 100  
Abbitt, Va., - 8  
Everett, Tenn., - 58  
Waggoner, La., - 8  
Perkins, Ky., \* 75  
Dent, Pa., \* 100  
Gibbons, Fla., - 58  
Nedzi, Mich., \* 100  
Brademas, Ind., \* 92  
Davis, Ga., - 50

Republicans

Schenck, Ohio, \* 18  
Corbett, Pa., \* 50  
Bennett, Mich., \* 64  
Lipcomb, - 8  
Chamberlain, Mich., \* 0  
Goodell, N.Y., \* 18  
Kyl, Ill., \* 20  
Curtin, Pa., \* 25  
Skabits, Kan., \* 0  
Devine, Ohio, \* 8

I really think there's not much use speculating about which way things would go if we ever got a decent report out of the subcommittee; nevertheless the party split, plus the reform sentiments of some of the democrats could conceivably, it seems to me, get the thing out on the floor of the House. This would, of course, depend upon massive support from every conceivable liberal organization. As much chatter as there's been about reform among liberal democrats, it seems remotely possible they'd see this issue as a means of furthering their reform desires. I understand, for example, that the reformists are horrified at the prospect of Colmer assuming chairmanship of rules, should anything happen to Smith. We could, I think, offer them an opportunity to get on board a rolling wagon. I really don't see that, at this stage of things, they're likely to find a basis for congressional reform without first attacking the source of the difficulty—the southern power on the committees. They might be interested in making an example of Mississippi in this respect, figuring this might bring some of the other southerners into a more reasonable perspective.

While it seems unlikely that we'd succeed in unseating the entire Mississippi delegation, I think we could raise enough of a storm to frighten them considerably. They're already pretty uneasy, judging by Williams' attempt to keep the special committee from prying into primaries. On the other hand, if we mounted a simultaneous attack through the democratic caucus, aimed at getting the Mississippians ousted from the party, we might wind up with an acceptable compromise (that bitter word).

I have asked Walter to begin feeling out some of our contacts on the Hill about trying to affect the appointments to the special committee. I've asked Len Holt to draft a complaint for filing with the committee. As I see it, the complaint would be based upon the disfranchisement of Negroes in Mississippi, and the consequent invalidity of the elections ~~which~~ (primaries) which sent the Mississippi Congressmen up there. At the same time I think we could attack through the democratic caucus by alleging that the party of which the Mississippi Congressmen are members is not an affiliate of the democratic party which makes committee and chairmanship assignments, and that, therefore, the Mississippi congressmen are not entitled to the consideration of the democratic caucus when it makes its assignments. I am not yet familiar with the procedure by which the challenge in the caucus can be made, but will expect to have that information shortly. I need, from you, to know whether you approve of this procedure, whether

the FDP folk approve it, whether you want me to go ahead and ramrod the thing, or whether you want someone in Jackson to handle it, etc.

If you and the FDP folk approve, then I think you should bring this up with Rauh at the earliest opportunity, get his opinion on it, and find whether he'll be willing to cooperate. I don't believe we'd have the shade of a chance even to create any kind of stir without the backing and participation of Rauh, Routhier, et al. I've suggested to Walter (or rather he suggested to me) that he get in touch with the AFL-CIO legislative rep and the Teamster rep and also that he mention the thing to Rauh. In addition to these people, I know very well that guys like Ryan could be interested in it, and possibly someone like Judge Collier, S. Currier, etc.

I think the caucus attack probably depends upon our success at the convention and would follow quite naturally from that success. I do not think this is true of the elections committee approach. I think we should plan to implement the latter, whether or not we succeed at the convention.

If we succeed with the special committee approach, there would have to be some hearings held, probably in Mississippi, by the special committee. The last time this happened that I know of was in 1946 when a group of Mississippians challenged Bilbo's election. This was a special committee of the Senate rather than the House. They came to Jackson in December of 1946 and held three days of hearings. They had sent three investigators to Mississippi several weeks in advance, to interview witnesses and complainants, etc. We would have to be prepared to go through all this paraphernalia. It would be a kind of repeat of the Washington hearings, except that it would be of considerably greater political import, I suspect.

I'd like very much to have your comments on all this as soon as possible. Will you be coming this way before long? If not when would it be convenient for me to meet you there?

All the best

Jack Minnis

cc: Tillow-Baker  
J. Bond  
J. Forman