

[1964]

Position Paper: 1 — For discussion at District Meetings, Sept. 20,

Reasons for the rejection of the Compromise at Atlantic City:

1. Supporters of the compromise argued that the two seats would have great symbolic value. But 68 symbols would have been a lot better than two. We must stop playing the game of accepting token recognition for real change and of allowing the opposition to choose a few "leaders" to represent the people at large. If the people are going to be heard in this country, then we must make the country talk with and listen to them, and not a handpicked committee. The people sent 68 representatives that they chose in open convention. The delegation could not violate that trust.
2. The first provision of that compromise was that the regular delegation would be fully seated and recognized. The FDP did not go to Atlantic City to vote for a proposal which would recognize the regular party as the Democratic representative in Mississippi. The FDP came to unseat the regulars because they don't represent the people of Mississippi. Even the two seats offered to the FDP would not have been Mississippi votes, but merely votes at large.
3. The compromise made pretense at setting up means of challenging delegations in 1968 from states which interfere with Negro participation in the Party. But the Credentials Committee, in private talks with the FDP delegation, said that it would not guarantee a single registered voter added to the lists in the next four years. Less than 6 percent of voting-age Negroes are now registered in the state. In order to participate in regular democratic party politics in Mississippi you must be a registered voter. The compromise proposal dealt only with "voters". So, even if Negroes are permitted to attend meetings in 1968 to prove the party is "open", they don't stand any real chance of having a voice in the decisions of that party.
4. Some supporters of the compromise argued that the FDP was representing all Negroes in the country and the two seats-offer would mean a lot to them in the Northern cities, where much rioting has been taking place. But the 68 persons came to Atlantic City to represent the Negroes of Mississippi and not the country as a whole. That is the nature of all delegations at the convention. It is unreasonable to ask the Mississippi delegation to bear the burden of the entire country. There is no reason why the Negroes in Mississippi should be sacrificed on the altar of national politics.
5. The compromise offered no precedent for the future, especially since it was not based on any precedent in the past. It offered the FDP nothing in the way of permanent recognition, patronage, official status or a guarantee of participation in the 1968 convention. The compromise was a completely one-shot affair; the FDP is not.
6. The committee set up to review such matters for the 1968 convention has no official status or power with regard to the 1968 convention. It may look good on paper, but its strength lies there on the paper and nowhere else.
7. The compromise was an effort by the Administration, led by Pres. Johnson, to prevent a floor fight on the issue at the convention. The compromise was not designed to deal with the issues raised by the FDP in challenging the regular delegation. Therefore, if it was reasonable for the administration to offer such a compromise, it was certainly just as reasonable for the FDP to reject it.