

MEMO to Friends of SNCC and other contacts
RE Freedom Democratic Party Challenge
FROM Betty Garman

December 3, 1964

What follows below and on the next few pages is some summary information on the Congressional Challenge. From now on you will receive mailings from the Freedom Democratic Party office in Washington, D.C.:

1353 "U" Street, NW
Washington, D.C.
(202) 332-7732

Questions about organizing for the challenge and a good deal of your information and consultation should come from them. At the same time because we have the WATS line in Atlanta, Barbara Jones and myself will try to keep up with most things happening on the challenge front so that we can answer questions, relay requests, etc. But on the whole you should develop an ability to write letters to the FDP office in D.C.

ORGANIZATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY CHALLENGE

The challenge of the seating of the representatives from Mississippi will follow the sequence set forth in the statute covering this kind of challenge (Title 2, USC 201-226.) This process requires the reinforcement of widespread popular and community support to ensure that the purely legal process is undergirded by an outside force, independent of the internal politics of the Congress. This is going to require a high degree of organization in strategic areas which will have as its goal:

1. To disseminate to as wide an audience as possible the real issues and conditions that are at issue in the challenge.
2. To create the kind of home-town interest which will influence congressmen to support the challenge at the various points where this kind of support will be necessary in Congress.
3. To build closer relationships between MFDP and northern community groups particularly the Negro community, trade unions, liberal and civic organizations.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The first stage of activity will center around making certain that as large a number of House members as possible are educated to the nature of the challenge and are committed to its support. Towards this end certain specific jobs will have to be done within the next four weeks.

- a. A committee should be formed in the local community to support the challenge really very quickly, certainly within two weeks of this meeting (Nov. 28). It should be composed of people willing to devote time and energy to working for objectives necessary to the challenge. These committees are not envisioned as letterhead or token groups consisting of prestige names and little else. Individuals who hold memberships in civil rights groups, trade unions and other organizations will probably constitute an important segment of the community, but the committee should not be viewed as a coalition of organizations but as a separate organizing committee of individuals.

The first tasks of the committee will be: 1. To contact the congressman from their area and inform them of the challenge and their interest in having the congressman's support before December 15th. 2. To organize a delegation to visit the Congressmen at home urging that he support the challenge or the attached resolution publicly before Congress reconvenes on January 4th. An appropriate form for publicizing this support must be devised. 3. To develop a campaign of letters, petitions, expressing support of the challenge to the Congressman and to the House Committee on elections of the Administration Committee and organizing public meetings and

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rallies designed to demonstrate community support for the project. If your congressman supports the challenge you may want to invite him to speak at a mass meeting.

SECOND STAGE - (After Jan. 4th)

Other valuable organizing devices might be employed depending on the resources, and individual support, that the committee is able to muster.

- A. State ments from prominent local leaders in churches and unions should be procured as part of the campaign within the community. Most of these people will not participate in direct forms of pressure but may be persuaded to support the challenge in the press, letters to their constituents, or in public meetings.
- B. A major fund raising activity might be planned in support of the challenge.
- C. Arrangements for speaking engagements for members of the FDP to important local organizations. A speaker will be available for mass meetings, union and civil rights affairs provided the transportation and expenses are available from the sponsors (this may vary).
- D. Contacting the local press and acting as a liason for placing press statements in local papers concerning the development of the challenge.

The challenge is not a short erm campaign ending on January 4th. with the convening of Congress. Up until that date the major focus will be on the sending of delegations to the local Congressman individual contact by his constituents and at least one large public function.

The permanent committee may need a program of more varied and prolonged activity after January 4th if the local Congressman is not willing to take a position before the initial battle on opening day of Congress.

The MFDP seeks its own relationship with northern and other southern based community organizations. Literature concerning the challenge will be provided for use in local communities. After January 4th another conference will be called to evaluate experiences and to discuss strategy for the next stage of the challenge.

WHAT YOU SHOULD ASK YOUR CONGRESSMAN TO DO

1. Support the Challenge of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
2. Co-author a Fairness resolution reading as follows:
" Be it resolved that pending the final decision of the House in the contest and challenges to the seats from Mississippi, no person claiming those seats shall be allowed to take the oath until this contest or challenge is decided by the House."
3. To vote for the Resolution in "2" above.
4. To vote to request a roll call vote on all issues concerning the challenge including the Fairness resolution and the final vote on the challenge.

It is quite possible that your Congressman will not be willing to do all of the four above things. They are listed in the probable order of greatest support for the challenge. In other words, if your Congressman is willing to agree to "1" then it follows that he should be willin to agree to all four, etc. etc.

Be sure to keep a careful report of your interviews, noting those points your congressman does or does not support and exactly what he has committed himself to do. Also note questions which you were unable to answer so that our FDP representatives in Washington can follow up. After your interviews are over, send reports to the FDP in Washington, c/• Lawrence Guyot or Jan Goodman.