

THE REPLY OF LAWRENCE GUYOT, CHAIRMAN OF THE FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY, TO THE CHARGE OF THE MISSISSIPPI CONGRESSMEN-ELECT THAT THESE LAST HEARINGS ARE ILLEGAL

Attorneys for the five Congressmen-elect from Mississippi today announced that they would not be present during the Freedom Democratic Party's final Congressional Challenge hearings scheduled to begin in Jackson on Thursday, April 1st. These hearings will provide the FDP with an opportunity to present additional evidence in support of its contention that the five Congressmen were illegally elected.

Under the statutes governing the Challenge procedure, the Freedom Democratic Party is entitled to a ten day rebuttal period. The option to use these ten days is not contingent upon the contestees having produced evidence of their own. One can rebut by introducing new evidence, and this the FDP intends to do.

Messrs. Patterson, Coleman and McClendon make the further presumption that this evidence, which shall be submitted to Congress, will be "unauthorized and immaterial." This is clearly a matter for the Congress to decide.

We believe that the announcement today is entirely consistent with the Congressmen's failure to take evidence of their own. In the face of thirty-five thousand pages of documented evidence--gathered during the FDP's first deposition period--any attempt on their part to prove Mississippi Negroes had not been denied voting rights would have been ludicrous. They have nothing to say. They have no answer.

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, people from across the state will testify that persisting acts of intimidation and violence directed against Negroes have taken place since the onset of the Challenge. Evidence of continued violence and lack of law enforcement gives an entirely different picture of Mississippi from the one being loudly proclaimed by public officials. Behind the "new image" we shall expose the ugly reality we are determined to change--with or without the help of Congress.

\* \* \*