

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
1353 U STREET, NW
WASHINGTON, DC

March 17, 1965

WHY WE GO TO CAPITOL HILL TO SPEAK WITH OUR REPRESENTATIVES

Sunday a week ago in Selma, Alabama, hundreds of Negroes were inhumanely brutalized for peacefully demonstrating for the right to vote, supposedly a right enjoyed by all Americans. Last Monday, President Johnson appeared before the joint session of Congress to call for legislation that would give this right to all Americans. Yesterday, as the words of the President were still sounding over the mass media, 300 Negroes in Montgomery were set upon and beaten for demanding these same rights.

We feel that the problem of voteless citizens and police brutality and the violation of the rights of Negroes in the South are closely related and are a national disgrace and one the Congress of the United States has direct responsibility for correcting. We therefore called upon our Congressmen to do three things which we feel are necessary to ensure that all Americans are free from violence and oppression and are free to participate in the political processes of the nation.

1. Ensure that any voting legislation passed include provisions for holding new elections within six months after Federal Registrars begin registering voters in any given area. It appears to us that the presence of the federal registrars is certain proof that huge numbers of people were unconstitutionally deprived of the right to participate in previous elections, and that in fairness new and open elections should be held as soon as these deprived citizens are placed on the voting rolls. We further believe that the kind of official and totalitarian violence that crushed the Negro people of Selma and Montgomery cannot prevail if officials who are responsible to the total population are elected.

2. We are aware that there have been three pieces of legislation during the last seven years that were intended to open the vote to Negroes in the South. They failed to do this. We feel that legislation on the Federal level alone will never do this effectively unless local officials in the South find it necessary to cooperate with and implement this legislation. This will only be done if these officials see their authority in jeopardy as is the case in the challenges to the Congressmen from Mississippi now pending before the Congress. We call upon our representative to support this challenge by voting for the unseating of the Mississippians when this vote comes to the floor. This will be an unmistakable lesson to officials in Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama and the rest of the South and will ensure that all citizens of that state are allowed to vote.

3. We call upon our Congressmen to urge and advise President Johnson and the Attorney General to protect with the use of Federal marshals, FBI Agents and troops, if necessary, the right of Negroes to peacefully assemble and to petition their government for the redress of grievance. This was attempted only yesterday in Montgomery and the result was violence and injury to the Negro citizens of Montgomery.

We feel that unless these three things are done the efforts of President Johnson and the Congress to bring democracy in the true sense to this country must fail. We call upon all Congressmen and the country at large to join with us in this effort so, in the words of President Lyndon B. Johnson, "WE SHALL OVERCOME."

Concerned Citizens and
Friends of SNCC from Michigan,
Massachusetts and Wisconsin