

THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
360 Nelson Street, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia

STATEMENT BY JOHN LEWIS, CHAIRMAN  
May 17, 1965, Washington, DC

The issues raised by the MFDP Challenge to the Congressional delegation from Mississippi go to the heart of Negro exclusion from the political processes in Mississippi and the South.

The questions of the challenge goes beyond the processes of registration. It goes to the issue of actual participation in elections and the political processes. It is entirely possible that the mere fact of being registered--thereby qualified--to vote will not enable Negroes in Mississippi to actually vote since economic intimidation and violence will still be available to those who are opposed to Negro voting.

The Challenges are based specifically on the lack of Negro participation in the elections of November, 1964. The evidence covered by the depositions given cover not only obstruction to registration, but the acts of economic harrassment and violence that are also used as a matter of policy by the State. It is only when the Congress unseats the Mississippians and calls for and conducts free and open elections in Mississippi for these seats that the Negroes in the state will be free to participate. It is only when the Congress takes these actions that the political forces in the South that are opposed to Negroes' voting will understand that Congress and the Nation are serious about guaranteeing the rights of Negroes to fully participate in the processes of government.

Recognizing this the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee stands ready to commit the major portion of its organizational resources and energies to the support of this challenge during the next two months.

We plan to use our organizing staff in Mississippi to support the voter registration drives, mass rallies and political demonstrations called for by the local community leaders of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Our offices and support organizations in the north are working with other organizations in northern communities to publicize the challenge and garner congressional support from these communities. We are at present recruiting 2,000 students and young people to convene in Washington in June for the purpose of engaging in lobbying and educational workshops around this challenge.

These young people engaged in the Washington Lobby will disperse, some to Mississippi to participate in activities there and others will return to their home communities to organize activities directed to local congressmen. This activity will be in support of unseating the Mississippians and calling for free elections in Mississippi.

SNCC stands ready to support with all its organizational resources, both north and south, any call that comes from the MFDP and its allies for a national mobilization of people in Washington.