NEW YORK COMMITTEE
FOR THE
MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
Suite 803 100 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

Panel for
Direct Support
of M.F.D.P.

Panel for
Joint Political Action with
M.F.D.P.

Panel for
Independent
Political Action

March 7, 1966

Mr. John J. Burns, Chairman
New York State Democratic Committee
Dryden East Hotel
150 East 39th Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear Mr. Burns:

Though our nation has taken a number of legal steps to affirm the right of Negroes to enter into the political life of the South, their actual participation--as you undoubtedly know--is still far from a reality. In Mississippi, the great mass of Negroes still cannot vote and are still not permitted to participate in the "official" Democratic organization.

On at least two recent occasions, the national Democratic leadership was given the chance to set back, and perhaps shatter, the illegal white supremacist practices of the Mississippi Democratic organization. We refer to the challenge to the segregationist delegation at the Democratic National Convention of 1964, and to the seating of the Mississippi delegation to the House of Representatives in 1965. It cannot be forgotten that on these two occasions, when the backbone of resistance to political democracy could have been broken, the practitioners of illegality were allowed to preserve their system.

You will doubtless recall that the National Convention of 1964 did pledge to eliminate political discrimination in all state organizations by the time of the next convention, and that a committee was set up to see that this was accomplished. Within the next two months, the National Democratic Committee will have a third opportunity to change the white supremacist practices of the "official" Mississippi organization, and thereby to move toward redemption of the convention pledge.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party has announced that it intends to contest in the primaries four seats for the House of Representatives and the United States Senate seat currently held by Senator Eastland. It has also announced its intention to enter candidates in primaries for local office. By acting now to prevent the "official" state organization from continuing to bar these candidates, as well as other Negroes or white civil rights advocates who may desire to become candidates, the National Committee and the special committee set up by the 1964 Convention can effectively cripple white supremacy in Mississippi Democratic politics. Therefore, we call upon you and the New York State Democratic Committee to:

1. Prevail upon the National Democratic Committee to act on the pledge of the 1964 Convention by taking whatever actions are necessary to see that the Mississippi primaries are open to Negro candidates fully and without harassment, including:

   The issuance of a public declaration that the National Committee is concerned about free primaries in Mississippi and is watching the situation;

   The selection of a delegation of Democratic leaders to go to Mississippi, to examine both the registration of Negro voters and the primary elections.

2. Appeal to the President to use his influence and appropriate powers of the Federal Government to guarantee open primaries without harassment;

3. Call upon the Attorney General to appoint more federal registrars, and to take all other steps available to him, to ensure maximum registration of Negro voters, as well as to see that their voting rights in the primaries are secured;

4. Enlist the support of other state Democratic organizations along the above lines.

We have no doubt you will agree with us that such actions, effectively taken, would constitute a major step toward the

realization of political democracy in Mississippi and thus in the South. We also assume that you realize with us that failure to act now in the spirit of the 1964 National Convention pledge will deepen the developing disillusionment with the Democratic Party among Negroes, as well as among others interested in the establishment of full equality for all Americans.

Sincerely,

Robert Z. Lewis

Robert Z. Lewis
Chairman

cc: Mr. John M. Bailey, Nat'l Democratic Committee Chairman
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