

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY  
926 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC  
546-4450

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO: All Media  
SUBJECT: Statement by Lawrence Guyot, Chairman

Washington, DC, May 17, 1965--Today The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is submitting to the Clerk of the House of Representatives more than 600 depositions of evidence taken in Mississippi conclusively proving that the five Congressmen from that state were elected by processes violating the Constitution of the United States and the political rights of over 400,000 Negroes in Mississippi. These depositions of evidence were collected by lawyers acting in behalf of the MFDP in support of the challenges we have instituted to the seating of the congressmen from that state under Title 2, Section 201-26 of the United States Code

OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION OF STATE AUTHORITIES IN NEGRO DISENFRANCHISEMENT.

This testimony is not only the statements of hundreds of Negroes in the State describing shootings, private acts of intimidation such as bombings, beatings, evictions, and dismissals from jobs which they suffered for attempting to register. It also includes conclusive evidence of officially perpetrated and inspired harrassment, the admission of state officials of their own participation in organized racism, and illustrates the close ties and over-lapping interests between such organizations as the White Citizens' Councils and the State Administration in depriving Negroes of the right to vote.

Mr. Earl Johnson, Jr., Director of the tax-supported Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, admitted under oath that as of January 1st of this year \$193,000 drawn from public funds had been give by that agency to the White Citizens' Council. Richard Morpew, Public Relations Director for the Citizen's Councils, admitted to having received the money and testified that, "The first major accomplishment and the first project undertaken by the Councils on a state level was the passage of the (Mississippi) constitutional amendment to raise voter qualifications in Mississippi."

Mr. Morpew testified that "it was not uncommon for a great many people in public life in Mississippi to be proud of their membership in the Council," and that Congressmen Whitten, Colmer and Williams "participated in Citizens' Council Forums," and that to the best of his recollection Governor Johnson is a member.

Over 400 depositions of local Negroes and voter registration workers document the patterns of intimidation and terror suffered by Negroes seeking to vote. Mrs. Aylene Quinn of McComb testified that her house was bombed after she sheltered voter registration workers and attempted to register. The bombers were released with suspended sentences. George Johnson, a law student working on voter registration in Greenwood, testified that police officers threatened him with castration while he was in custody at the jail.

In making these depositions, amounting to over 15,000 pages of evidence, the Negro people of Mississippi have again come forward to risk reprisals of violence and terror. However, these depositions, formally signed and witnessed, are an incontrovertable body of evidence proving that the general elections of November, 1964, in Mississippi were unconstitutional. They prove that the conditions described by President Johnson on March 15th, "The harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes. Every device of which human ingenuity is capable has been used to deny that right," applies very specifically to Mississippi.

(over)

RESPONSIBILITY PLACED WITH HOUSE.

The submission of this evidence and the filing of a final legal brief completes the legal aspects of the challenges. We have made enough evidence available to the Congress to convince any reasonable and unbiased panel. We now call upon the Clerk of the House, the Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration, and the members of Congress to act swiftly to ensure that the House of Representatives has a full opportunity to examine the evidence and charges brought in these challenges at any early date.

There are, for example, a number of depositions which are being inexplicably held up by white notary publics and hearing officers in Mississippi. In these cases we are submitting duplicates of all statements which are still unsigned by the Mississippi officials with receipts showing that the hearing officer is in possession of the originals which have not been sent back as the Statute provides. We urge the Clerk to proceed with all subsequent steps of the challenge.

CHALLENGE ENTERS NEW PHASE--NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAM BEGINS

After today the progress of this challenge will be at the pace imposed by the internal machinery of the House. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is presently engaged in taking the issue to the Nation. With the support and assistance of major organizations within the civil rights movement--The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, The Congress of Racial Equality, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and others, we are currently engaged in discussion to formulate a program of action in the North and the South. Mr. James Farmer of CORE and Mr. John Lewis of SNCC are present to discuss this further.

On April 24th a conference was held in Washington to begin the national effort in the north. In addition to the civil rights organizations there were representation from 40 civic, religious and labor organizations from 30 states. Action is now being taken to bring to Washington delegations from these states to bring the issue of the challenge to Congressmen from the various areas. This effort will culminate in a national convocation in Washington during July.