



# Southern Reporting Service

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## NEW CRISIS IN MISSISSIPPI

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI (June 14, 1965) --Governor Paul B. Johnson has called for a special session of his State Legislature to liberalize state voting laws. A statement issued by the Governor on June 7 declares: "Mississippi will continue to set her own voting requirements....However, with no desire to circumvent, but to take reasonable steps to delete some laws from our statutes, we shall find ourselves in a more favorable position to fight a strong but fair battle when the situation demands."

One's first assumption is that the "battle" referred to has to do with the federal Voting Rights Bill. However, the section of the Bill authorizing federal intervention in a state bases such intervention on voting and registration conditions as of November 4, 1964. So a change in Mississippi's voting laws at this date will probably not affect the impact of the Federal Voting Bill on the state. It is therefore likely that this action by Governor Johnson is aimed at improving Mississippi's image in order to gain public support for the state in the issue of the Challenge to the seating of Mississippi's five Congressmen by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

This is not the first time the State Legislature has attempted to meet a civil rights "crisis" in Mississippi. In the spring of 1964, with the Council of Federated Organizations' (COFO) Summer Project impending, the Legislature considered 37 bills aimed at stifling civil rights activities. Eight of these were passed. Among the eight was an "anti-leafleting law," a "Municipal Agreement Act" which allows municipalities to share police forces during "riots and civil disturbances," and an appropriation of \$50,000 to the State Sovereignty Commission for the purpose of

fighting the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, which was before Congress at the time.

With the 1965 Voting Bill pending, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's Challenge to unseat the five Mississippi Congressmen moving into its final stage, Mississippi again faces a "crisis."

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) plans to protest the convening of the special session of the Legislature, set to begin June 14, by urging people from all over the state to come to Jackson during the session. MFDP members and supporters will make known their objection to the fact that the State Legislators, like the five Congressmen, were not elected by all the people. They will also call for Free and Open Elections following the passage of the Voting Bill.

Supporters of the MFDP's Congressional Challenge have frequently pointed out that the decision to unseat the five Mississippi Congressmen is a logical extension of the federal Voting Bill. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, an MFDP spokesman, said with regard to the calling of the special session: "This is proof that the voting bill won't mean anything until effective federal action is taken to enforce it. In 1870, Mississippi was readmitted to the Union because their laws said they wouldn't discriminate against Negroes. They have been discriminating against Negroes ever since. Governor Johnson is just as illegal in office as the five Congressmen, because we didn't get a chance to vote for him either, and he has no right to make laws about voting."

MFDP Chairman Lawrence Guyot noted: "This latest action by Governor Johnson further substantiates the allegations brought forth by the MFDP in the Congressional Challenge that the official policy of the state of Mississippi is to do everything in its power to hinder Negroes from participating in the political processes of government."

And an editorial in the Tupelo, Mississippi Journal, one of the more "liberal" newspapers in the state, points up the relation between the Congressional Challenge, the Voting Bill, and the principle of Free and Open Elections: "...there is a very real possibility that if our legislature started acting up as it has in past

years, Congress would not only throw out our five members of the House of Representatives but would order new elections for every county and city office in the state. This latter possibility is generally ignored in Mississippi political circles.

"But the groundwork for it has already been laid by lawsuits seeking court orders for new local elections and by introduction in Congress of a proposal to throw out every local office holder in Mississippi from constable and supervisor to sheriff and mayor."

So in the halls of Washington, and in the towns and fields of Mississippi, the confrontation between segregationist politicians and disenfranchised Negroes goes on.