

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
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HOUSE COMMITTEE SCHEDULES HEARINGS ON MISSISSIPPI CASES
MISSISSIPPI NEGROES BARRED FROM HEARING ROOM AS
CLIMAX NEARS IN ELECTION CHALLENGES

Washington, D.C. - September 9.

Republican members of the House Subcommittee on Elections yesterday blocked an attempt by Southern Democrats to vote on a motion to dismiss the challenges to the seating of the Mississippi House delegation. Representative Charles E. Goodoll (R-NY), who led the fight against the Southern move, argued that committee rules prescribe hearings in contested election cases. In the face of the stiff GOP opposition, Subcommittee Chairman Robert T. Ashmore (D-SC) was forced to schedule hearings on the dismissal move. These are to be held Monday, September 13th at 8:30 a.m. in the U.S. Capitol Building. The motion to dismiss was introduced on August 24th by four of the five Mississippi Congressmen.

In a telegram sent to attorneys representing the Negro contestants, Chairman Ashmore specified that the hearings were to be held behind closed doors and that "all argument will be confined strictly to the motion to dismiss."

In their wired reply, attorneys for contestants cited the "critical national public importance" of the challenges, and requested that the hearings be open to the press, Members of Congress, and the public. They argued that the Committee's own rules provide for closed hearings only in the event of an executive session. The scheduled hearings, they said, is "obviously not 'executive session'...since contestants, contestees, and attorneys have been invited to appear."

The lawyers for the contestants also requested that the question of the validity of last November's Congressional elections in Mississippi be considered. They asked that argument be heard "on contestants' demand...that the seats of the sitting Mississippi Members be vacated and that new elections be held in each Congressional District under such conditions as will protect the full participation of Negro voters of Mississippi in the selection of Members to represent them in the House of Representatives."

Lawrence Guyot, Chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, said today in Jackson, "The attempt by the Southern members of the Elections Subcommittee to force a vote on the motion to dismiss the challenges proves that the Mississippi Congressmen and their segregationist allies are running scared. They have seized upon a spurious technical argument in order to avoid confronting the real issue-- Mississippi's state-enforced policy of Negro disenfranchisement. Elections Subcommittee Chairman Ashmore and House Administration Committee Chairman Burleson have already given every indication that they favor the move to dismiss the challenges. Monday's hearings, which are closed to the public, are a clumsy attempt to legitimize the Committee's ruthless strategy."

"The action of the Republican members of the Subcommittee proves that the issues raised by the unlawful exclusion of over 90% of the Negroes of voting age in last November's Congressional elections go far beyond the narrow confines of partisan politics," Mr. Guyot said.

The Chairman of the MFDP also announced that hundreds of Freedom Democrats will leave Mississippi on Saturday for Washington. "They are going to witness their faith in the integrity of our system of representative democracy. The Executive Committee of the MFDP will go into emergency session tonight to consider holding a state convention in Washington on Monday."

DEPOSITION HEARINGS (cont.)

Mrs. Dorothy Binum, 28, from Greenville, Washington County:

"I was arrested on March 23rd this year. What happened was that we tried to go down Solomon Street. This was not our normal way to the Mills and Chief Burnley said he would not let us go that way. So we took off the signs we were wearing, and some of us, went two-by-two towards Solomon Street. That's when we were arrested. We were taken to jail, just for marching.

I don't think there's been any change in Greenville, not in the way we are treated. They don't want to talk to us or anything like that.

Roosevelt Vaughn, 34, from Starkville, Oktibbeha County. Roosevelt Vaughn was working at the Mississippi State University, near Starkville, until a few months ago. He was fired for Civil Rights activities, and since then he has become a COFO staff worker.

"Just a little over two weeks ago several of us went down to the movie theater in Starkville. We had been there two days previously. This time there was alot of whites around. Two of us went inside the theater. We stayed in a truck outside. Pretty soon the Whites - I should say there were about 200, most of them students from the University - gathered round the truck. At first they were friendly, then this guy, a taxi driver, came up and he began inciting the crowd. Police were among the crowd while students were shouting at us "Goddam Niggers", and "Son-of-a-Bitch", and other things. One of the guys in the crowd came to the truck but he backed off when someone on the back pulled out a knife.

Anyway the situation looked bad. We called the Freedom House and the Sheriff, Bill Harpole, was contacted. He came along and told the crowd to get away from the truck, then he went to escort the two from the theater. I overheard the Chief of Police saying to some Whites that Harpole "just belonged in the country".

When we got back to the Freedom House it was about midnight. From then to about 2am we had about 15 threatening telephone calls. What started all this I think was the jailing of a young boy four days previous to the incident outside the theater. We protested the jailing and that stirred people up.

But even before this things haven't been too good. I was sitting one day in the Greenland Cafe when a policeman by the name of Welfare came up to me and said: "I am going to throw you in jail". I asked him why and he replied: "Because you are Black".

I believe that if the Sheriff was not keeping the peace there would be a riot in Starkville. The City police will not let any civil rights activities go on - if they can help it. I have talked to people from Aberdeen, Columbus, West Point, and Amory, and from what they have said things are still bad in those places.

Sammy Rinson, a farmer for 25 years at Ruleville, Sunflower County:

"On June 23rd, 1963 I was beaten up by the Sgt of the State Penitentiary. He came to my house looking for escaped prisoners. He thought I was hiding them. He put a gun to my head and then kicked me; he kicked me over when I was on the ground. For 4 weeks after this I had to attend a Dr's clinic at Drew, and as a result of the beating I had to stop work.

I was put on welfare. At first I got \$77 a month for my family. I have nine children, seven of them under 13 years old.