

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
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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. Goodell (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 AM 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 permit the full participation of Negro citizens 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 challenge 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 Burlison 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 the 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."