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TO ALL MEDIA

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CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT MOBILIZES AGAINST MOVE TO DISMISS CHALLENGES
MFDP PROTESTS EXCLUSION OF MISSISSIPPI PEOPLE FROM SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS

Rep. Robert Ashmore, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Elections of the House Administration Committee, has refused an MFDP request to open the scheduled hearings on the Mississippi challenges to the public and the press.

In response to the MFDP telegram pointing out that the committee's rules do not provide for closed hearings and the request that the hearings scheduled for Monday, September 13th, at 8:30 a.m., be open to both the public and press, Chairman Ashmore replied: "Reference to telegram September 9: This will reaffirm arrangements set forth in my telegram to you of September 8 which are by direction of Elections Subcommittee and must be followed with strict compliance."

This reaffirmed that only the contestants and their lawyers would be admitted to the hearings and that discussion would be limited to the motion to dismiss made by the Mississippians.

Mrs. Victoria Gray, contestant in the Fifth District of Mississippi, called the hearings "most irregular." "It is difficult to understand what might be said in these hearings that must be kept secret. Some 600 people from Mississippi who are vitally concerned with these challenges are en route to Washington. This issue affects their lives and constitutional rights and I cannot understand why Mr. Ashmore should want to bar them from the hearing. What can occur in these hearings that must be kept from the press and the nation?"

Mrs. Gray expressed the hope that the Subcommittee would reconsider and allow the people from Mississippi to attend the hearings.

The MFDP announced that the Civil Rights Movement has rejected anything as the Committee's plans to move the dismissal of the challenges.

From Atlanta, SCLC and SNCC both issued statements urging opposition to the Committee's motion. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "To dismiss these challenges under these conditions by a motion based on a technical contention, without any regard to the injustices exposed by the challenges would precipitate a real moral disaster for the Nation. Citizens all over our nation would be repelled.... I urge every Congressman to vote against such an action." Dr. King telegraphed Members of the House urging their opposition to the Committee's motion.

John Lewis, Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee said:

"This kind of a dismissal of these challenges would seal the disillusionment of the Mississippi Negro in ever being able to receive justice from the system of American democratic procedures." To meet the emergency needs of the challenges, Mr. Lewis said that SNCC staff members had gone on half salary for the past two weeks.

James Farmer, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality, told a press conference that he had notified all CORE chapters to protest the move to dismiss the challenges and to prepare to mobilize in Washington to support the Mississippi vigil.

CORE telegraphed Members of Congress: "HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE PLANS TO REPORT MOTION OF MISSISSIPPI CONGRESSMEN TO DISMISS THE CHALLENGE TO THEIR SEATS. MOTION WILFULLY IGNORES THE ISSUE OF DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF MISSISSIPPI NEGRO. WE URGE THE STRONGEST OPPOSITION TO COMMITTEE'S MOTION AND STRONGEST SUPPORT OF CHALLENGES."

The Civil Rights Leadership Conference, a coalition of some 83 organizations scheduled a special emergency meeting for Tuesday, September 14th, "to discuss the new developments and to formulate a Leadership Conference position." The Leadership Conference said it was calling the meeting at the request of the National Council of Churches--Commission on Religion and Race, SNCC, SCLC, and CORE.

Today on the desk of every Congressman is a statement signed by over 250 ACLU attorneys calling on the House to vacate the seats of the Congressmen from Mississippi. Opposing any motion to dismiss the challenges on procedural grounds, the statement said: "It would be unjust and self-defeating for Congress to apply 2 U.S.C. 203 et seq. in such a way as to exclude from the ambit of its procedures the persons they were designed to protect: those complainants who, like the contestants here, failed to be designated on the ballot because of the very injustices sought to be remedied."

In Mississippi, Charles Evers and Aaron Henry, Director and State Chairman of the Mississippi NAACP, issued statements deploring the Committee's attempt to dismiss the challenges.

The NAACP said that there would be an influx of national dignitaries and supporters of the challenge to Washington beginning the 11th. "The nation is not going to stand still while such a blatant injustice is done to 400,000 Negro citizens of Mississippi," Mrs. Gray declared.