

the
Congressional
Challenge
1965

*hope of
America's
disenfranchised
Negro*

M F D P

A major accomplishment of the Mississippi Summer Project was forming the statewide MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY, who's Chairman is Lawrence Guyot, a former SNCC voter registration worker. The MFDP parallels the National Democratic Party in structure. Open to all and dedicated to ONE MAN/ONE VOTE, it is at present mainly composed of Negroes. The MFDP formed because Negroes are excluded from the "traditional" Mississippi Democratic Party and this party will not abide by National Democratic Party decisions and practices. The MFDP tried to run candidates in primary and general elections but racist officials rejected petitions to place Negroes on the ballot. Because of this, the MFDP runs Freedom Elections, listing all candidates on the ballot and letting anyone of legal age vote. These are the only elections in Mississippi based on the U.S. Constitutional requirements.

As Negroes were excluded from all "traditional" Democratic Party conventions, the MFDP had a series of their own ending in a statewide convention which sent a full delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City last summer. They sought seating as official representatives from Mississippi and pledged to support the National Democratic Candidates and Platform, while the "traditional" Mississippi Democratic Party did not. Although they were not seated, they returned to Mississippi and diligently worked to support the Johnson-Humphrey slate. Leaders and workers of the "traditional" Party openly supported Goldwater. He carried the state by a landslide only because Negroes, who constitute 40% of the state's population could not vote. In the MFDP Freedom Election, however, the MFDP ticket for Johnson-Humphrey and three local Negro congressional candidates won overwhelmingly.

Using the provisions set down in Title 2, Section 201-226 of the U.S. Code, the MFDP decided to Challenge the seats of the five Mississippi congressmen in the U.S. House of Representatives. On January 4, when the House convened, Rep. Ryan (D-NY) and 50 cosponsoring congressmen moved a "Fairness Resolution" to unseat Mississippi Congressmen pending the outcome of the Challenge. House Majority Leader Carl Albert (D-Okla.) substituted a Johnson backed motion to seat the congressmen pending the outcome. The vote on this motion was 276 for and 149 against. It is evident that 149 congressmen felt that the Mississippi congressmen-elect should not be seated.

We must keep these supporters and recruit more. This is most essential now that the new "voting bill" has focused attention elsewhere. The "voting bill" even if passed without any hindering amendments, will have to be tested in the courts, which will take years. The method of the Challenge, however, has been fully tested and can be put into effect immediately.

The Challenge will shortly be before the House Subcommittee on Elections which must report the Challenge to the floor of the House. The final vote is expected early this summer.

If the Congressional Challenge is a success, this will open the door to more Challenges from other states where Negroes are disenfranchised and will notify the South that the U.S. House of Representatives will no longer tolerate the illegal elections from which Negroes are excluded. The Challenge is the one hope for sweeping changes in the South which will allow the Negro to participate in the American Democratic Processes, as is the right of all citizens.

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how you can help

Top community, church, civic, political, etc. leaders should be contacted and urged to use the channels open to them to influence the Congressmen from their area to support the Challenge. All organizations should pass resolutions in support of the Challenge and mail copies to the Congressmen and a copy to the MFDP.

A massive campaign of letters, telegrams, petitions and phone calls to the Congressmen from this area must begin at once to influence their vote for the Challenge.

Congressmen should be urged to pressure the House Sub-committee on Elections to handle the Challenge in a fair and prompt manner and to report it out to the floor of the House as soon as possible. The Congressmen should pledge themselves to vote for unseating the Mississippians.

Write or wire your Congressman TODAY!

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