

1/16/64

TO: COFO STAFF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
FROM: CONVENTION COMMITTEE
RE: PLANS FOR ACTION AT NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

I. GOALS OF CONVENTION CHALLENGE

An investigation of the structure of the Democratic Party in the state of Mississippi revealed that it will probably be very difficult for us to set up local clubs and successfully claim that they are in fact the Democratic Party of the state. However, while we probably cannot unseat the delegates to the Democratic National Convention, it does seem that we can:

1. utilize this opportunity to familiarize the COFO constituency with the workings of the Democratic Party on the local and national level
2. focus national publicity on Mississippi and the racist character of the party in this state
3. make voting in the South an issue at the convention
4. create tensions between the Northern and Southern wings of the party which could possibly result in:
 - a) support for the unseating of Congressmen and Senators
 - b) support for our candidates and/or moderate whites for offices in Miss. and the rest of the South by money in the party
5. create ties between COFO delegates to the convention and the liberal wing of the party which will result in help for us in the future (publicity, money, political advice, pressure on the JD, etc.)

II. BASIS FOR CHALLENGING THE SEATING OF MISSISSIPPI DELEGATES

While we may not be able to actually prevent the seating of delegates, we should make as strong an argument as possible for the seating of our people as delegates. We will claim:

1. The Mississippi Democratic Party should not be seated because it is not open to a great number of the Democrats of the state in that it discriminates against Negroes. It does this by limiting the participation in its affairs to registered voters. (If some of our people are excluded from party meetings despite registration, all the better. We can then include the fact that the party excludes Negroes directly.) It is beyond question that Miss. discriminates racially in determining who will become a registered voter. (Here insert proof of such discrimination. Use Justice Department brief.) Nor can the Miss. Dem. Party escape responsibility for the fact of voting discrimination, for that party has, in effect, been the state government since the end of reconstruction. (Here cite statistics.) And it has been the policy of that party to promote a pure white electorate. (Citations here from party literature.)

The Freedom Democratic Party, on the other hand, is open to all people who wish to belong regardless of race. (A COFO meeting will have to decide whether it wants to identify itself.) Its caucuses have been publicly announced in advance. Both registered and non-registered citizens

The Freedom Dem. Party not only seeks to prevent segregation, but actively attempts to achieve integration. It is the party that speaks for all Mississippians who subscribe to the principles of the National Democratic Party.

2. The Mississippi Dem. Party does not support the policies of the Nat. Dem. Party. Rather, it is opposed to them. Not only on the issue of civil rights, but on other major points of policy is this the case. (Here there should be a point by point comparison of the Kennedy '60 platform and the Dem. State Convention platform.)

The Freedom Dem. Party is closely allied to the Natl. Dem. Party. It supports the following planks of the '60 platform: (List them.)

3. The Miss. Dem. Party has conclusively demonstrated its alienation from the Natl. Dem. Party through its frequent and bitter attacks on the national party and its leaders. These attacks reached a zenith during the 1963 gubernatorial race, when Paul Johnson and J.P. Colman each sought to convince the electorate that the other was the "Kennedy candidate" and should therefore be rejected. (Include details and quotations.)

4. The Miss. Dem. Party has no intention of supporting the platform adopted by the candidate chosen by this convention. Ross Barnett, a leader of the Miss. Dem. Party, has made clear his intention to lead his party in support of an independent electors plan which attempts to put the election into the House of Representatives. (quotes here from ole Ross and others.)

The Miss. Dem. Party will not only reject the Natl. Dem. Party candidate; leaders will attempt to get other states to do the same, thus endangering the Natl. Dem. Party campaign effort.

5. The Miss. Dem. Party in 1960 refused to honor its pledge to support the chosen nominees of the convention. It convened immediately after the national convention and agreed to support a slate of unpledged electors, with the purpose of defeating the National Dem. Party nominees. The state electors were in fact unpledged.

(Note: Point 1 requires that we send some eligible Negro voters to precinct conventions in hopes they will be excluded. It also requires a public announcement of some sort for the COFO district and/or state meetings. If this is not done, our argument is weakened. It should be possible to get free air time for this. If not, a small legal ad in the local newspaper run 2 or 3 times will suffice.)

(Note #2: The arguments above should be viewed as tentative, to be refined as suggested in Action Proposals.)

III. HOW DELEGATES TO THE CONVENTION ARE CHOSEN

1. The Precinct Convention

Any "Qualified elector" (ie, registered voter) may attend the precinct convention. Precinct conventions are called by the chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee, who must announce the date at least 10 days in advance. They are usually held on a Tuesday during the months of Feb., March, or April. They begin at 10 A.M. and are held at the regular

voting place of the precinct. The precinct convention elects from 1 to 6 delegates to the county convention. Often these votes are split in half and an alternate is elected for each delegate. (This means that if there are 2 votes from the precinct it may send 3 people.)

(The meeting is presided over by the temporary chairman who is appointed by the County Democratic Executive Committee, until the chairman can be elected. The convention adopts its own rules. It can also pass resolutions which serve to express its sentiments but are not binding.)

2. The County Convention

The County Convention elects delegates to the State Convention. Each county has twice as many delegates to the state convention as it has representatives in the Mississippi House of Representatives. (They actually send four times that many people to the convention, using the plan of splitting the vote in half and having an alternate for each half vote.)

(This convention also selects the County Democratic Executive, which has 15 members. Nominations for the committee are selected by 5 caucuses, and nominations may be made from the floor. The County convention can also adopt resolutions.)

3. The Congressional District Caucus

The delegates elected by the county conventions to the state convention meet by Congressional District a week or more after the County convention. The meetings are usually held a week apart. At this meeting the delegates elect:

- a) six regular and three alternate delegates (representing three votes) to the National Democratic Convention.
- b) three members to the State Democratic Executive Committee
- c) one candidate for Democratic Presidential Elector

4. The State Convention

The delegates elected by the County Conventions come to the state convention, which meets in Jackson a week or more after the last Congressional Caucus. The Convention

- 1) ratifies the election of delegates who were selected by the Congressional District Caucus, and 2) elects the rest of the delegates to the national convention. (In addition, the Convention adopts a platform, ratifies the election of the 15 people elected by the Congressional District Caucuses to the State Democratic Exec. Committee, and elects the National Democratic Committeeman and Committeewoman. These last two sit on the Democratic National Committee, which is in charge of policy for the party between conventions.)

(Note: Mississippi has 24 votes at the Natl. Dem. Convention. The Jackson Clarion Ledger indicates that they will be sending 68 people: 46 delegates and 22 alternates. This means that two people have whole votes and the rest half votes. Since the State Committeeman and Committeewoman usually share one vote, this probably means that the state convention will elect 14 delegates, two of whom will have whole votes, and 7 alternates.)

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IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

The original thought in developing a plan for setting up political organization in the state was that local COFO units could claim to be local Democratic Clubs if COFO decided to work within the framework of the Democratic Party. However, given that the Democratic party in this state does not function by clubs, that argument may not hold up. Further to seriously challenge the delegates elected at the state convention, the proper procedure would be to have our people go to district caucuses and challenge the convention on some grounds and then set up a rump convention which would be the real convention. These would then appeal to the county convention for recognition. If this were denied they would organize on up the line (county, and state convention on their own. It does not seem that we have 1) sufficient registered voters to do this or 2) sufficient strength around the state to organize to get people in numbers to every precinct which includes Negroes.

There are things that could be done on the precinct level, however:

1. Unregistered people could go the precinct meeting and claim they are in fact qualified electors but have been discriminated against. They would get thrown out. These people should have registered in the Freedom Registration. We can then claim these people would be registered Democrats but are discriminated against by the state (which is in turn controlled by the party.)
2. Registered voters can go and try to introduce resolutions from the 1960 Democratic Platform. We will really need only the state platform to claim that the Mississippi Party is a state party only and not really a part of the National party in its thinking. It is likely that our people will not be allowed to speak, will be seated in segregated seats, etc. and we can claim that the party does not give a fair hearing to all its members. (It is unlikely that they won't be admitted since that is illegal and the Mississippi party knows that)
3. The Freedom Registration should be set up by precinct (that is people will be told their precinct, etc. when they register to educate them to the process of the party.)
4. On the state level a COFO convention can select the other delegates to the National Democratic Party Convention. These people will go to the Credentials Committee according to whatever rules we discover are applicable.

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In addition a great deal of work needs to be done prior to the convention on the National level.

1. There should be a meeting of COFO people and liberals in Congress and other places in the party. (For instance Rep. Bolling is supposedly willing to support a challenge to seating Mississippi delegates.) This meeting should a) get us information on whether our basis for challenging is the best one; b) get their commitment to help with strategy and support us at the convention; c) perhaps get help with money for transportation of our delegates.

2. There should be a meeting of COFO people and other people in civil rights who are interested in demonstrations or action at the convention so our plans do not conflict and we can get their advice on strategy, publicity, etc. They could also advise us on the possibilities for civil disobedience, not against the convention itself (which would probably not win us any friends) but against the Mississippi delegation -- lying in front of their hotel rooms, etc. Bob Moses is trying to get such a group together, we understand.