

## CHALLENGE OF THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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### I. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Three basic considerations underlie the development of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and its plans to challenge the seating of the delegation of the Mississippi Democratic Party at the 1964 National Democratic Convention. They are:

1. The long history of systematic and studied exclusion of Negro citizens from equal participation in the political processes of the state grows more flagrant daily.
2. The Mississippi Democratic Party has conclusively demonstrated its lack of loyalty to the National Democratic Party in the past, and currently indicates no intention of supporting the platform of the 1964 Democratic Convention.
3. The intransigent and fanatical determination of the State's political power structure to maintain the status-quo clearly demonstrates that the "Mississippi closed society," as Professor James W. Silver of the University of Mississippi asserts, is without leadership or moral resources to reform itself, and hence can only be brought into the mainstream of the twentieth century by forces outside of itself.

#### A. PARTY DISCRIMINATION:

The Mississippi Democratic Party controls the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government of the State. All 49 senators, and all but one of the 122 representatives are Democrats. Repeatedly, the State legislature has passed laws and established regulations designed to discriminate against prospective Negro voters. The 1963 gubernatorial campaign was largely directed towards restricting the Negro vote. The state convention is being held in the Jackson Municipal Auditorium and the Heidelberg Hotel, both of which are segregated. In its devotion to racism and suppression of minority expression, the Mississippi Democratic Party prevents Negro Democrats and white Democrats who disagree with the party's racist stance from participating in party programs and decisions.

#### B. PARTY DISLOYALTY:

Mississippi citizens who desire to do so cannot support the National Democratic goals by joining the Mississippi Democratic Party. The Mississippi Democratic Party has declared in public speeches and printed matter that it is NOT a part of the National Democratic Party. The campaign literature for the election of Governor Paul B. Johnson, in November 1963, is a case in point, as the following excerpts show: ... "Our Mississippi Democratic Party is entirely independent and free of the influence or domination of any national party" ..... "The Mississippi Democratic Party, which long ago separated itself from the National Democratic Party, and which has fought consistently everything both national parties stand for....."

In 1960 the Mississippi Democratic Party failed to honor its pledge to support the nominees of the National Democratic Convention. Immediately after the convention the Mississippi party convened a convention and voted to support unpledged electors in an effort to defeat the nominees of the Democratic National Convention.

### C. THE CLOSED SOCIETY:

"It can be argued that in the history of the United States democracy has produced great leaders in great crises. Sad as it may be, the opposite has been true in Mississippi. As yet there is little evidence that the society of the closed mind will ever possess the moral resources to reform itself, or the capacity for self-examination, or even the tolerance of self-examination." from Mississippi: The Closed Society, by James W. Silver.

Civil rights groups working in Mississippi are convinced that political and social justice cannot be won in Mississippi without massive interest and support of the country as a whole, backed by the authority of the Federal government. As the political leadership of Mississippi feel threatened by the winds of change, they devise new and more extensive legal weapons and police powers. Police preparations were made all through the spring to harass, intimidate, and threaten the educational and political programs now being carried on in Mississippi. Five new bills, prohibiting picketing, banning the distribution of boycott literature, restricting the movement of groups, establishing curfews, authorizing municipalities to pool police manpower and equipment, and increasing penalties that may be assessed by city courts, were hurriedly signed into law. Other similar bills are still pending.

## II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was conceived to give Negro citizens of Mississippi an experience in political democracy and to establish a channel through which all citizens, Negro and white, can actively support the principles and programs of the National Democratic Party. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a confederation of all the local civil rights and citizenship education groups in Mississippi, is assisting local citizens to develop the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

This party is open to all citizens regardless of race. It was officially established at a meeting in Jackson on April 26th; the approximately 300 delegates present elected a temporary state executive committee, which will be responsible for setting up precinct and other state meetings. These meetings will parallel those of the Mississippi Democratic Party, and every effort will be made to comply with all state laws which apply to the formation of political parties. Registered voters in the Freedom Democratic Party have already attempted to attend precinct and county meetings of the Mississippi Democratic Party, an experience which only offered further proof of the racial discrimination rife within this party and of its disloyalty to the National Party (See Appendix).

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is presently engaged in three major efforts: (1) Freedom Registration; (2) Freedom Candidates; and (3) The Convention Challenge.

A. FREEDOM REGISTRATION:

Official registration figures show that only some 20,000 Negroes are registered in Mississippi as compared to 500,000 whites. This represents less than 7% of the 435,000 Negroes 21 years of age in the state. The Freedom Registration is designed to show that thousands of Negroes want to become registered voters. By setting up registrars and deputy registrars in counties across the state, some 100,000 or more persons may be inscribed on the Freedom Registration books by the time of the Democratic Convention. Last November some 83,000 Negroes voted in a mock gubernatorial race, in which COFO President Aaron Henry ran against Gov. Paul B. Johnson.

The Freedom registrars will use simplified registration forms based on voting applications used in several Northern states. Any person who registers in the Freedom Registration will be eligible to vote in the Freedom Democratic Party conventions and to participate in party work.

B. FREEDOM CANDIDATES :

The four candidates who qualified to run in the June 2 primary in Mississippi were nominees of the Freedom Democratic Party. The Freedom Candidates plan to run again in a mock election under the auspices of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in November. This will help to establish the fact that thousands of Negroes are deprived of citizenship participation because of the racist character of Mississippi's voter registration procedures.

The four candidates are Mrs. Victoria Gray, opposing Senator John Stennis; Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, opposing Rep. Jamie L. Whitten; the Rev. John Cameron, opposing Rep. William M. Colmer, and Mr. James Houston, opposing Rep. John Bell Williams.

The Platforms of the candidates of the Freedom Democratic Party articulate the needs of all the people of Mississippi, such as anti-poverty programs, medicare, aid to education, rural development, urban renewal, and the guarantee of constitutional rights to all. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of real issues in the campaigns of the candidates who won in the primary. Senator Stennis did not even bother to campaign in the state.

C. THE CHALLENGE TO THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION:

Delegates from the Freedom Democratic Party will challenge the seating of the "old-line" Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention this August in Atlantic City, New Jersey. All steps necessary to preparing and formally presenting the challenge of the Freedom Democratic Party are being taken. Several State Democratic Conventions have already passed resolutions in support of the challenge. BUT WE NEED YOUR COOPERATION AND HELP!

1. We need convention delegates to champion the cause of representative government in Mississippi.
2. We need people who will speak out in the credentials committee and on the convention floor.
3. We need hundreds of Democrats - individuals and organizations - to instruct their delegates, petition their representatives, party leaders, and the President to face up to the fact that only a renegade Democratic Party exists in Mississippi - a party which enjoys the benefits of national affiliation, but spurns all responsibilities. Such a party can only continue to bring disgrace to the National Democratic Party.