

MEMORANDUM

April 7 1965

TO: ALL CORE Chapters

FROM: Dr. George Wiley, Associate National Director

RE: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

In view of the dramatic developments in Alabama over the past several weeks, much of the national focus has shifted away from the crisis in Mississippi. But the crisis continues and in fact grows more acute every day. In every Mississippi Congressional District, CORE and SNCC workers continue to risk their lives in voter registration drives, community center operations and a half dozen other on-going programs to seek and secure real personal and political freedom for Negroes in that state. The Alabama crisis actually serves to underscore the size and importance of the challenge throughout the deep south.

There is no single aspect of this drive more important than the program of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. By way of re-cap, let me briefly remind you of the Party's short history. After being refused the right to appear on the official state ballot last year, MFDP conducted its own "Freedom Registrations and Elections" and took its case to the Democratic National Convention in an attempt to unseat the "regular" Mississippi Delegation. Although the attempt failed, MFDP was able to dramatize its case to the nation to the acute embarrassment of the state of Mississippi and the South as a whole.

In January, MFDP made its next move by challenging the "regular" Mississippi Congressional Delegation under Title II, Section 201 of the United States Code. The statute provides for a clearly specified procedure to be followed to determine the validity of the challenge. It makes no provision for which delegation should be seated in the interim. At the opening of Congress on January 4th, Congressman Ryan (D-N.Y.) introduced a "fairness" resolution calling for the unseating of the "regular" Mississippi Congressmen until the MFDP challenge could be adjudicated. Though this resolution failed it won remarkable support with 51 members of the House voting to unseat the Mississippi regulars. The procedure under the challenge is still in motion. It is now a period for the taking of depositions and counter-depositions in Mississippi. The information gathered by both sides will be submitted to the House Committee on Elections and Privileges some time in late June or early July. Southern strength on this committee makes a favorable recommendation from the committee appear unlikely. MFDP is hopeful of bringing the whole matter back to the floor of Congress for final decision some time in July. The objective is to unseat the present Mississippi Congressional delegation, and secure new elections in Mississippi under federal supervision.

CORE has helped develop the MFDP from its inception. We supported the challenge at the Democratic National Convention by direct action and by lobbying. We must support the Congressional challenge even more vigorously. The MFDP and this challenge is by far the most significant political development that the civil rights movement has produced. The strength shown by the "fairness" reso-

lution has forced the power structure in the state of Mississippi to take the MFDP challenge seriously. A congressional victory on the challenge, which is not beyond the realm of possibility, would give tremendous impetus and encouragement to Negroes' voting drives all over the South. The successes to date have already encouraged the building of an indigenous political organization in Mississippi.

The civil rights movement has now recognized the need for the development of political power if we are to achieve the goals we seek. Success of the Mississippi challenge, coupled with a strong voting rights bill could be determining factors in bringing about rapid and dramatic changes in the South.

Three memoranda relating to these matters are enclosed. One is a copy of Farmer's testimony before the House Judiciary Committee. It sets forth the areas in which we think the Administration's voting rights bill needs strengthening. The second is an MFDP memorandum on lobbying. It includes specific suggestions on how to line up support for the MFDP challenge. Some of the same basic techniques, of course, would apply to the securing of support for strengthening amendments to the Administration's voting rights bill. The third is an invitation to the MFDP National Conference on April 24th. I hope your chapter can send representatives, not only because of the possibilities it affords for getting information on the voting rights bill and the MFDP challenge, but because it should be a significant focal point for discussion of national political organization for the civil rights movement.