**Give Me Back My Name: Joe Rauh and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s 1964 Democratic Party convention challenge. By Mike Miller**

In Arthur Miller’s play, *The Crucible*, based on the Salem witch trials, hero John Proctor refuses to sign his name to a false confession—even though it would save his life. He won’t sign, “Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!”

In 1965, I had a “Because it is my name” meeting with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s 1964 convention challenge lawyer, Joseph Rauh. Rauh has been identified as having sold out his client—agreeing to try to sell them the so-called “two seat compromise” that President Johnson was prepared to offer. Most recently, Rauh was so identified in the documentary, *Freedom Summer*, recently shown on PBS television.

Rauh insisted to me that while he thought the compromise should have been accepted, he continued to pursue as effectively as he could his client’s position: that the MFDP delegation be seated.

Here’s the story that I believe to be accurate. The detail is important, so let me quote extensively from Walter Mondale, who at the time was a Senator from Minnesota and a close associate of both Hubert Humphrey, about to be nominated as Lyndon Johnson’s vice-presidential running mate, and Walter Reuther, President of the United Auto Workers of America (UAW), for whom Rauh was chief counsel.

The following is taken from “The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the 1964 Democratic National Convention,” by Walter F. Mondale, Minneapolis, Minnesota; February 11, 2000.

“After Hamer's powerful testimony, the Freedom Democrats had captured the momentum at the convention. The stakes had been raised. They were in the center of the national spotlight, and their demand for seats could not go unanswered. We knew that the issue of whether any of the Freedom Democrats would be seated as delegates at the convention would make or break the compromise.

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 “Everyone attending the meeting agreed to the plan and we knew we had to act that day. The convention had already gotten underway with the Mississippi seating issue still unresolved. Humphrey and Reuther spent the next hours trying to sell the proposal to convention leaders, including the Freedom Democrats.

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“I bumped into Joe Rauh on the way to the committee meeting. He had heard the details of our proposal from Walter Reuther, who had demanded that Rauh support it.  Rauh told me that if I could give him a little time he thought he could sell it to the Freedom Democrats. I trusted him. I said I would try to help him get the time, and I tried to do so.”

Joe Rauh’s role continues to be disputed to this day.  When I was the Bay Area representative for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Rauh asked Northern California Democratic Part leader Nancy Swadesh if she could arrange a meeting for him with me.  He wanted to talk about Atlantic City and to clear his name of any implication that he was not loyal to the decisions of the MFDP.  While he may have agreed to try to convince the MFDP of the “compromise,” when MFDP refused to accept it, if his conversation in San Francisco is to be believed, he, too, rejected it.  I am willing to give Rauh the benefit of the doubt on this.  I think Johnson was manipulating him as he tried to manipulate everyone else.

“When the committee reconvened - in closed session - I made my presentation.  I acknowledged that our proposal didn't go as far as either side wanted, but 1 said it recognized the problem of discrimination in the party and outlined a plan of action to end it. I presented our proposal and made my arguments for adoption.  Joe Rauh then asked for a recess to allow him to discuss it with the Freedom Democrats. But Chairman Lawrence pushed for an immediate vote. By then the committee was demanding action. I am sure that the White House feared that Rauh would use the time to stir up further pressure on the committee. In any event, after four days, an impatient committee adopted our proposal on a voice vote. Rauh tried to get a minority report, but he didn't have the votes.  I then walked straight from the committee room to the largest news conference I had ever seen in my life, where I announced the committee action.”

Note here an inconsistency between what Mondale says Rauh privately told him and Johnson’s fear that Rauh would “stir up further pressure on the committee,” as well as Rauh’s effort to get a minority report from the committee.

“The timing of the committee vote and my announcement of it have been sources of controversy ever since. Many of the Freedom Democrats learned about the committee vote from the television news while Humphrey and Reuther were still trying to persuade them to accept the compromise. When Bob Moses saw the announcement, he screamed ‘you cheated!’ and stormed out of the meeting. He was convinced that the Freedom Democrats had been tricked. He thought they had been called into a meeting with Humphrey while the Credentials Committee was voting in order to stop them from rallying for a better deal. To make matters worse, some of the news reports suggested the Freedom Democrats supported the proposal; in fact, they hadn't yet decided what to do about it.”

It is possible that Mondale, Humphrey and Reuther did not know that Lyndon Johnson was using them as ploys to stall the MFDP while the Committee vote was actually taking place.  But in the broader sweep of things, that is not a very important specific fact.  No one in the civil rights movement was more patient, careful and respectful in his dealings with others than Bob Moses.  I doubt he "screamed."  I have been with him in the most intense circumstances and haven't even heard him raise his voice.  I also doubt that he "stormed out of the meeting."  Had he done either or both of these, they would have been totally out of character.  At the same time, if he did "scream" and "storm out,” these acts are only indicative of how wrong Lyndon Johnson was in his decision to undermine the MFDP's challenge.

“I wish we had given Rauh some time to caucus with the Freedom Democrats before we acted, but we didn't. I wasn't able to deliver on my promise to him. Certainly the Freedom Democrats were entitled to a decent interval to consider our proposal. I am not proud of how this was handled, but I do believe our proposal was a good resolution of the issue.”

It is unusual for politicians to make the kind of admission that Mondale makes here.  He should be affirmed for doing that.

“There was plenty of hardball politicking going on behind the scenes. Johnson wanted this issue settled, and he leaned hard on the Freedom Democrats' supporters to go along with this compromise. There's no doubt that the White House pushed to get a fast committee vote once they knew that support for a minority report had all but evaporated. But even without a trick meeting - and I don't think the meeting was a trick - the compromise would have passed. We had debated it for four days and the compromise went farther than most people - including Johnson---expected.

“Both the Mississippi regulars and the Freedom Democrats angrily rejected the compromise. The Freedom Democrats were particularly angry at being given only two at-large seats and having the delegates for those seats chosen for them. Fannie Lou Hamer shouted ‘we didn't come all this way for no two seats!’  Many of them spent the rest of the convention protesting, and some remain bitter to this day.”