Two weeks ago I issued a challenge to the other candidates for governor of South Carolina to debate with me on the demerits of the Barnwell ring. One of the candidates accepted that challenge and we arranged to have the debate in Spartanburg this week but the Barnwell ring, grown so arrogant and powerful that it can even control some candidates for the governorship, demanded that the debate be called off.

These scheming, conniving, selfish men cannot control Strom Thurmond. That is why they are fighting me in my campaign for governor. They are fighting me for their very political existence and I tell you here tonight that if you good people elect me governor, I will do everything in my power to eliminate their pernicious influence upon the government of our state.

Even though this other candidate for governor bowed to the dictatorship from Barnwell and withdrew from the debate, I feel that you people of Spartanburg and other Piedmont counties—people who have always opposed the unhealthy influence of ring rule—are entitled to know about this unholy domination of the state government by a few willful men.

I have denounced Edgar A. Brown, president of the Senate, and Solomon Blatt, speaker of the House, throughout this campaign and I will denounce them for the remainder of the campaign. I tell you why. Their domination of the government even extends into the office of governor but when Strom Thurmond is your governor, their influence will cease and they will be forced to scurry back to their holes.

These individuals have taken under their control many of the affairs of the state through which they can better themselves regardless of the best interest of South Carolina. They have become more and more flagrant in the abuse of their powers. They have distorted and misinterpreted the constitution and statutes and parliamentary procedures in the two houses of the legislature for their own benefit.

I do not claim that Barnwell's Brown and Barnwell's Blatt control everything in the state government, but I do say that they trade and scheme
and connive to get an iron grip on as many departments and commissions as possible to serve their own purposes.

Let's take Edgar Brown and show how he is so powerful. He is presiding officer of the senate. He interprets all the rules. He appoints all the free conference committees. He dominates the selection of committee membership.

He is chairman of the senate finance committee which acts on all matters concerning the state of South Carolina's money. He is a member of the state budget commission which supervises the spending of money by all state departments and institutions. He is a member of the sinking fund commission which is in charge of all public property of the state, including the personnel needed to operate the huge office buildings in Columbia. He is a member of the joint committee on printing which awards all state printing contracts. He is a member of the state retirement board which decides upon the retirement rights of not only state employees but employees of many counties and towns throughout the state.

He is, in addition to being chairman of the senate finance committee, chairman of the committee on interstate cooperation and a member of the board of managers of the council of state governments. He is a member of these senate committees: Banking and Insurance, enrolled acts, highways, military, penitentiary committee, rules and social security. So you see that hardly any legislative measure of real importance can go through the senate without having to pass through the hands of Edgar A. Brown.

Not content with these powers, Senator Brown has recently become a member of, and is chairman of, the Clark's Hill public power project which hopes to spend millions of dollars of federal money to develop a hydroelectric plant on the Savannah river in McCormick County.

Number two of the Barnwell ring is Solomon Blatt, speaker of the house. His powers over certain phases of legislative activity are even more powerful than Edgar Brown's.
Blatt presides over the house. He appoints all of its committees, he interprets all of its rules and he can recognize his favored members and disregard his opponents when legislation is being debated.

Solomon Blatt has consistently violated the constitution and the rules of the house to suit his own and Edgar's purposes. Much of the important work of the house of representatives is done in committees and one house rule--No. 17, if you please--specifies that--and I am quoting--"The speaker of the house shall not appoint more than twenty-one (21) members on any standing committee of the house."

Well there are 31 standing committees listed in the official legislative manual for 1946. Of these 31 committees, 19 have more, by virtue of Blatt's dictatorial appointments, than the the legal 21 members. Most of the 12 committees whose membership is within the proper limits have relatively unimportant functions. Speaker Blatt has increased the membership of these committees to suit his own purposes and to create obligations necessary to keep himself in the speaker's chair.

Now here is a specific example of how this intrigue works.

Seven years ago when Blatt was up for re-election as speaker, there was a vacancy in the ways and means committee's chairmanship. Now Blatt not only wanted to retain his speakership but he also wanted to control the ways and means committee. Winchester Smith, a fertilizer dealer of Barnwell County, was a member of the house and Blatt wanted Smith as chairman of this committee which handles all money matters in the house. Blatt arbitrarily increased the membership of the committee to 32 which is 11 more than the rule permits.

Nearly all members of the house want to be on the ways and means committee because of its great power. Therefore a candidate for speaker can win many voters for himself by promising other house members appointments on this committee. The chairmanship of the ways and means is filled by the committee members.
Now I do not say that Mr. Blatt increased the size of the committee to re-elect himself or to elect Barnwell county’s Winchester Smith, but I do say that both Blatt and Smith were elected. Two years later, these two individuals were up for re-election and this time Blatt increased the size of the committee to 35 with the result that both he and Smith were retained. Today the committee has 42 members—more than one-third of the total house membership of 124.

Four years ago, it was necessary for Barnwell to lose one of its house members because its population had decreased. Blatt or Smith had to go. Actually Blatt stayed and Smith ended up with a full-time, well-paying job on the public service commission which regulates and fixes rates of power companies, telephone companies, bus and truck lines and other public utilities.

And here is how the Barnwell ring got this soft touch for Barnwell’s Winchester Smith. Mr. John McMillan of Ulmers, a man of splendid character and a brother of former congressman, T. S. McMillan, was a member of the commission from that district. I want to quote from a letter I have received from Mr. McMillan, telling of how he was smoothly removed from office and Winchester Smith of Barnwell county put in his stead.

"On the afternoon of December 12, 1941," Mr. McMillan writes, "They (meaning Brown and Blatt) held their meeting with a dozen or more of their henchmen. It was there that they decided to give Win the job as commissioner and at that time his candidacy was announced, sending out telegrams and phone calls to members of the legislature all over the state. They even tied up my own delegation to the extent that they were told not to nominate me when the election came up a few weeks later."

Mr. McMillan goes on to say that three days after the session of the legislature began, one of their henchmen, "introduced the election resolution at 11 a.m. calling for the election at 11:30. It was all done within the course of an hour and while I was at my office only a block away. This was the first and only time a commissioner was elected within an hour from the
time the resolution was introduced.

Now that recitation of facts shows how this ring can completely dominate affairs of state and how they can remove from office men of the high calibre of Mr. McMillan and install their own henchmen in power.

This same Winchester Smith has been used as tool on other occasions.

When the state democratic convention met in 1940 there was a great deal of manipulation and trading to elect a chairman of the executive committee. Two candidates emerged. One of them was an excellent man from Columbia and the other was this same Winchester Smith of Barnwell county. You can guess the results. The high type man of Columbia was rejected by this ring because they could not control him and Winchester Smith was stuffed down the throats of South Carolina Democrats.

When Smith’s term was out, the Barnwell ring managed to retain their stooge in power by defeating Mr. Eugene S. Blease of Newberry, a former chief justice of our supreme court.

But I tell you my friends, these powerful politicians feel themselves slipping. Only a few months ago when the Democratic party was going to elect leaders again, Mr. Smith announced that he was a candidate for reelection. But suddenly he disappeared from the race because the Barnwell crowd realized that things were getting too hot for them.

Now another pernicious piece of domination is the ring’s control of free conference committees which actually write the most important legislation. Brown is automatically a member when finances are involved and he appoints two other senators: Blatt names the house members and can select anybody he wishes.

In recent years, the free conferees on the appropriation bill have actually written far-reaching legislation into the bill contrary to the constitution and members of the general assembly have had to accept these major pieces of legislation when it was rammed down their throats by the Barnwell ring.
The budget commission has tremendous authority to alter state appropriations, reduce salaries and in general holds a whip hand over both state departments and the workers in those departments. Now Brown is a member of the commission, and the chairman of the ways and means committee of the house is another member. Blatt appoints the ways and means committee. If this ring has control of the governor, who is the third member, they have complete domination of state finances between legislative sessions.

The Barnwell crowd will tell you that they are powerful because of seniority. In part that is true. That makes it all the more important for a governor who cannot be controlled to serve South Carolina. If they control the governor, they have complete power over the legislative and the executive departments. They cannot control Strom Thurmond and they are desperately trying to defeat me. They cannot. Their dictatorial powers are coming to an end.

Their hold—their stranglehold—on South Carolina government and on the Democratic party is slipping. They realize that the end of their days is coming. They are trying, by their vicious and false attacks upon me, to delay their downfall. Right now they are circulating falsehoods about me. They are trying to retain a grip on the state by working for my defeat, but I tell you, they are doomed. The good people of South Carolina are through with dictatorships and domination by these scheming crowd of selfish individuals.

You can expect many more falsehoods to be told about me before this campaign is concluded. They have their errand boys out right now raising money to be used in efforts to defeat me. They have sent these satchel-carriers around the state calling on various people in an effort to get money—not their own money of course, but the hard-earned cash of other people. It would be unthinkable for them to spend their own so long as they can find suckers to contribute to their campaign loot.

There is much more I could tell you but my time is up. From the very first day of the campaign, I have denounced this ring rule. I will continue to denounce it at every opportunity.
They are frightened at the prospect of losing their power. They are working mightily to save the remnants of their machine. And they have profited to such an extent by their domination of various branches of our government that it is no wonder they are afraid of losing this domination.

Their efforts to maintain a stranglehold on South Carolina will be broken.

I am doing all in my power to break that stranglehold. I ask for your help in this task— for it is not an easy job to wipe out the stench and stain with which they have smeared our government for these many years.

They have little support from the people of the Piedmont section of South Carolina. They have few errand boys up here to do their bidding. They now realize their grip on other parts of the state is slipping. They are fighting for their political lives.

But they are going to be defeated by the right-thinking, honest and courageous people of our state.

And so, my friends, I tell you good night with the promise that I will continue to do whatever I can to eliminate this vicious, cunning, and conniving gang from the affairs of our state.