

REPORT
SEPTEMBER 17, 20, 1963
Diane Bevel

Tuesday, Sept. 17

Arrived in Birmingham, Tuesday afternoon.

Attended the funeral for the deceased Miss Robertson which was held that afternoon.

Had a conference with Rev. Shuttlesworth in which I verbally presented to him the enclosed proposal which C.T. Vivian and I had discussed in Atlanta for direct action in Montgomery. I emphasized that I thought that a concrete gain for Negro people should be gotten out of the tragedy of the bombing and murders. I told him that this proposal was a suggestion that there was probably something better that could be done, but at any rate, there should be some planning of strategy in which everyone should bring forth ideas and that we should take the best idea and try it.

Rev. Shuttlesworth asked some questions and then said in effect that he did not think that this proposal would be in order now, but he did agree that a strategy meeting should take place. He said that Dr. M.L. King was not in town, but after Dr. King arrived, he (Rev. Shuttlesworth) would see about having such a meeting.

He suggested that he would like to have a written copy of the proposal. He said he thought these ideas should not be released to the press. I concurred.

Tuesday night I worked out my paper and typed up the proposal.

Wednesday, Sept. 18

I had asked the Voter Education Project in Atlanta to mail some brochures here which I had understood that Mr. Blackwell had made up which would be helpful in a voter drive here. The lady who was to mail them however sent me 50 copies of the V.E.P. newsletter instead of the brochure. I distributed some copies around the office and motel.

Talked to some more people about the need for some concrete gains and discussed ideas of what they might be and how we might try to achieve them. Presented the idea of cutting off Montgomery's communications to some of them. These discussions were just that; they were not for the purpose of formulating any specific plans, to the contrary of some rumors. Did not mention the subject to the press.

Attended the funeral of the three deceased girls.

After the funeral, a throng of at least five thousand people remained outside the church. The crowd stood outside the church while the funeral cars left for the cemetery. They stood for at least 20 minutes or 1/2 hour then someone began singing "We Shall Overcome" Almost everyone joined in and sang. Soon people began marching while singing. There wasn't leadership for this march; no one knew where they were marching; indeed, it began in one direction and stopped and started again in the opposite direction. Practically everyone standing around eagerly joined in.

Virtually all of the leaders of the Birmingham movement had gone to the cemetery so the march progressed for a couple of blocks without leadership.

I was very concerned during this time because the crowd was in no mood to take any insults or brutality from the police. I felt that when the police attempted to block the crowd that bloodshed would result. The state troopers were a short distance ahead of the march and they invariably beat brutally when they encounter Negro people. Since the crowd was so large, unled and undisciplined and since ~~many~~ police show no scruples about beating and shooting people, I thought the situation was very dangerous. About this time I met Rev. King of Jackson, Miss. and Rev. Billups and both expressed the same fear of danger that I had. Rev. King and I cut off the last half of the march, explained the danger and asked people to disperse and go home, while Rev. Billups caught up with the front of the march and did the same. Capt. Lay, the Negro Civil Defense worker here was on the bull horn and after a time people did break up and start moving toward home.

My interpretation of this scene and ~~the~~ indeed of Birmingham in general was that people were ~~highly~~ highly aroused, frustrated, and sad, eager to do something, but no one knew what to do. This is natural. When children are murdered a man has a choice of doing something to bring about justice or losing his honor. This was manifested by rock throwing and pop bottle throwing incidents.

My conclusions as a result of the days experiences were:

1. That you can tell people not to fight only if you offer them a way by which justice can be served without violence. There is no other honorable alternative. Just to tell people not to fight after children are murdered and leave it at that is wrong and you are expecting and appealing to them to be less than men.
2. Every crowd on the street in this emotional atmosphere without instruction, discipline, and leaders present is ~~most~~ potentially dangerous. We still have two funerals to go.
3. People wanted to do something. Students repeatedly asked when demonstrations would begin. This energy could have been channeled

into a constructive, ~~organized~~ disciplined soul force aimed at creatively using this energy to achieve a concrete gain in stead of just suppressing it.

I expressed these sentiments to Rev. Shuttlesworth who suggested that I talk to Dr. King. I did so as well as showed him the proposal for action in Montgomery. I also suggested that a strategy meeting be set.

I did not feel that our conversation was fruitful.

Thursday, Sept. 19

Spent some time at the 9th Congressional District Voting office. Wiley Branton's office, I understand, is going to make available some money for a youth project here. Wilbur Crocien, I understand, is going to be in charge of the project. Crocien wants to reorganize the students to canvass along the lines of the way they worked in this spring's drive.

We got up a meeting of about a dozen students whom we felt would serve as a central group for helping revive the registration drive. The ~~minutes~~ minutes for that meeting are enclosed.

formulated

The enclosed flyer that was ~~presented~~ at the meeting ~~was~~ to be handed out after the funeral was not approved ~~at~~ by Rev. Gardner, so it ~~will~~ not be distributed.

was

Friday, Sept. 20

The whites are having a very successful voter registration drive. They are producing long lines at the courthouse. Whites are getting into the office to be registered at a ~~rate~~ much more rapid pace than Negroes do.

Worked on implementing minutes of the meeting the night before.