

Statement by Dr. Ralph David Abernathy
President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference
News Conference
West Hunter Street Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.
Jan. 28, 1969

Ladies and gentlemen of the press: I called this news conference this morning in the hope that I will be able to clarify some of the misunderstanding over some of my recent statements concerning the defense of James Earl Ray, the alleged killer of my closest friend, colleague and leader, Martin Luther King Jr.

I stated in my message on January the 15th in the Ebenezer Baptist Church what I felt to be the position of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, its Board of Directors, and all of its members in this matter.

You should all have excerpts from that speech in your hands at this particular time. Later I issued a statement through my office while seeking to recuperate from two attacks of pneumonia in the Virgin Islands and you should have copies of that statement, also. I have stated over and over again that the Reverend Mr. James Bevel is not a director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; therefore, he does not have the power nor the authority to speak for the Conference or for its Board of Directors. I'm sure you realize that this right is reserved only for the President of the Conference in the absence of the Board of Directors itself or the Conference in annual session.

Reverend James Bevel is the head of a department in SCLC known as Nonviolent Direct Action. He chooses to call it often Political Psychiatry.

I have stated before and I seek to state again that when Reverend Bevel offered to be the defense counselor for Mr. Ray, I felt that he was seeking to add new dimensions to the nonviolent approach as practiced in this country, with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference being its foremost leader. Never before have we sought to serve as lawyers. We have employed lawyers to defend us and to defend persons involved in nonviolent direct action. This dimension certainly would be new for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

I felt that Mr. Bevel was merely seeking to state what I had stated on January 15th at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and that is the fact that more than

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one person is guilty for the death of Dr. King, and to kill one person while letting the other hundreds, thousands, and even millions be free would be an atrocity committed on our part much worse than that committed by Adolph Hitler against the Jews during the reign of Nazism in Germany.

Finally, it is my thinking that Reverend Bevel, as the Director of Nonviolence, was merely seeking to say that there is a conspiracy taking place in this country to kill off our young, militant, brilliant leaders such as Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, and as a nonviolent organization founded by Martin Luther King Jr., certainly this individual who is purported to have been the person to have fired the trigger should not be killed, for the philosophy of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," if followed to its ultimate conclusion, would end up with a blind society and a toothless people.

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