

Newsletter

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FOR FREEDOM



Montgomery, Alabama: Left to right the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Clyde Carter, Bernard Lee, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy.

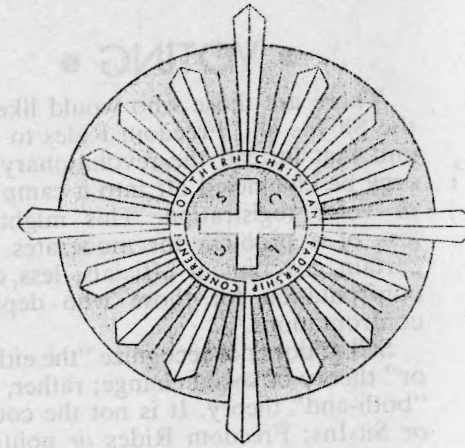
SCLC AND THE FREEDOM RIDES

SCLC did not initiate the Freedom Rides. That wonderful idea was the creation of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality.) Everybody who reads the newspapers or looks and listens to a TV or radio knows of the violence that the twenty-odd Negro and white bus riders, who headed South on May 4th, encountered when they reached Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama. Since the bus drivers refused to take them on to Montgomery, the CORE group took a plane for New Orleans, the terminal point of their journey.

At this time, students of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, an affiliate of SCLC, picked up the challenge, resolving that a Freedom Ride had to go on to Montgomery and to Jackson, Mississippi and that the segregationists must not be allowed to feel that their violence and obstruction could thwart the drive to test the proposition of whether Negro and white traveling companions could exercise their rights to use the eating and comfort facilities of the bus depots.

The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, "Mr. Civil Rights" of Birmingham and Secretary of SCLC, from the very beginning played a key role in the Freedom Rides. He was CORE's main contact in Birmingham and sent automobiles to rescue the Riders after their bus was burned by a mob at Anniston. When Shuttlesworth was seized by Birmingham police, his wife telephoned to the SCLC home office and was much relieved to learn that the Rev. Wyatt Walker, SCLC Executive Director, was already en route to the scene of violence and confusion.

When the Nashville Riders pushed on to Montgomery, it soon became clear that this would be the crucial task of the big battle for human dignity. Accordingly, SCLC leaders in various parts of the country dropped whatever they were doing and hurried to Montgomery. Jim Lawson SCLC staff consultant, joined the Nashville group. Wyatt Walker, Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King, Jr., flew in and began to mobilize the nonviolent forces.



Great questions for American democracy were at issue: What would the notorious Governor of Alabama do? What would the U. S. Department of Justice do? Could the Freedom Riders be frightened or crushed?

The world now knows the answers to these questions.

As the Riders streamed into Alabama and Mississippi, SCLC leaders maintained contact with the Department of Justice as well as with some of the local law enforcing agents, and the press. Moreover, A Freedom Ride Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was set up that brought together CORE, SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and SCLC. This closer cooperation among these sister organizations made for a more systematic approach to the Freedom Ride operation. It was realized, however, that many individuals and groups with varying backgrounds and orientations would join the movement. The coordinating committee insisted upon the discipline of nonviolence and pled for prominent Americans as well as others to bear witness to the cause by joining the Rides.

Some SCLC leaders were roughed up by police and mobs or were jailed. Wherever they were, in front or behind bars, they kept up their prayerful persuasion by song, word and conduct.

To date, SCLC has expended nearly \$15,000 in legal fees, \$10,000 in staff and transportation, \$3,500 in telephone and telegraph communications and nearly \$7,000 in cash appeal bonds. There are many related expenses which cannot be tabulated accurately. This is indeed a worthwhile though expensive commitment.

Operation Freedom Ride has given the nation — and the world — some realization of what the Negro traveler undergoes. Even more, it has given a vivid demonstration of the power of nonviolent social action. The inevitable victory for human decency has been brought closer. SCLC has conscientiously attempted to play its part.

• VOTING •

There are those who would like for the Sit-Ins and Freedom Rides to stop and that instead the revolutionary energy be channeled off into a campaign of voter registration. This might be less of a problem for moderates and certain government officials; less of a confrontation for those who deplore confrontations.

SCLC does not recognize "the either-or" theory of social change; rather, the "both-and" theory. It is not the courts or Sit-Ins; Freedom Rides or political action. All of these measures help reach the common goal of freedom and equality for all of God's children.

Thus, SCLC has planned for a stepped-up South-wide campaign of voter registration and hopes to get the large financial support that such an endeavor requires. In the meantime, as a sort of pilot project, SCLC is co-operating with the Atlanta citizens committee to secure some 10,000 new voters within a three-month span. Jim Wood, Public Relations Director for SCLC, is presently giving full time to this effort and SCLC is making other contributions of funds, facilities and personnel to this drive. It is hoped that new and more effective techniques will be developed in Atlanta so that a similar methodology may be applied elsewhere.

Leadership Training

It has been found that many persons do not vote because they are illiterate. To this end, SCLC has been seeking to set up literacy training centers that will give potential voters at least a "functional literacy" in a very short while and at the same time introduce them to the general philosophy of nonviolent social action.

This venture is meant to be an on-going, long-range project. SCLC is gratified that the Marshall Field Foundation has granted \$26,000 in much needed financial support. This has been done in cooperation with the Congregational Church.

After several tries, a training center for teachers of literacy has been set-up at Dorchester Community Center in McIntosh, Georgia, thirty miles south of Savannah.

Mrs. Dorothy Cotton, Educational Consultant for SCLC, has special responsibilities for this program and Mrs. Septima Clark, fully experienced in this work, has agreed to direct the instruction of these teachers for an intensive two-weeks course. She has joined SCLC staff.

A number of retired school teachers have volunteered to take this training in order that they may be better pre-

Contributions

It is a healthy sign that financial support of SCLC is gradually becoming as dependent upon sustained subscription giving as upon collections at mass meetings. For too long the burden of financial responsibility for the organization has rested largely upon the shoulders of our President. He found it necessary to speak continually in order that our monthly payroll could be met.

Within the past year, a substantial number of our friends and well-wishers have been persuaded to make and redeem pledges for a definite sum each year and this has enabled us to plan ahead a bit, instead of living, so to speak, hand-to-mouth.

Nevertheless, our income is still far beneath the call for our services; consequently, campaigns all over the nation are still necessary in order to balance our budget. Moreover, many of these mass meetings are such great spiritual experiences that we hope our friends will see that their contributions at the moment of inspiration are followed by regular, periodic giving during the months ahead.

Recently, several impressive rallies were held in different sections of the country that demonstrated the financial as well as moral support of our crusade. The Baptists of the Greater New York area sponsored a series of meetings that resulted every time in a standing-room only crowd. At the final meeting in Albany, Governor Nelson Rockefeller was present. Before hand, he had held an off-the-record conference with Dr. King and Rev. Walker. Dr. Sandy F. Ray sent a certified check for \$18,000 to SCLC on behalf of the Empire State Baptist Convention, the sponsoring organization.

In California, Dr. King, along with such stars of the entertainment world as Toni Harper, Dick Gregory, Mahalia Jackson, Herb Jeffries, George Shearing and Sammy Davis, Jr., with the Governor of the state and scores of other political and civic leaders in attendance, appeared before some 20,000 enthusiastic listeners on June 18th. The police estimated that more than twice that number had to be turned away from the Sports Arena. Some 6,000, who waited until the meeting was over, were admitted afterwards and for them Dr. King obligingly repeated his speech. Over \$26,000 was raised.

San Francisco also had a successful rally on July 23rd at the Cow Palace. On July 9th some 12,000 persons cheered at the Pittsburgh rally. Among the program sponsors was heavy-weight champion Floyd Patterson. Sammy Davis, Jr., would have been there but for the birth of his daughter, which occurred about the same time.

The special civil rights night of the National Sunday School and BTU Congress, held in St. Louis, was also remarkably successful. In addition to Dr. King, other SCLC luminaries participated in the program—the Revs. Abernathy, Shuttlesworth, C. K. Steele of Tallahassee and Kelly Miller Smith of Nashville. More than 12,000 delegates and friends contributed \$5,500 that Dr. O. Clay Maxwell, Congress President turned over to SCLC.

A dinner for friends who gathered at Theodore Kheel's home netted \$7,000 of which Mike Quill's International Transport Workers Union donated \$2,000, earmarked for the legal defense fund of SCLC Alabama leaders who have been sued for libel by public officials in that state.

Many smaller groups throughout the country have sent in contributions that in proportion to their membership represent as great gifts as those listed above. All are needed and fully appreciated.

DIRECTOR AND WIFE JAILED

The newspapers have carried some account of the jailing and treatment of the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Executive Director of SCLC, and his wife Ann. They were Freedom Riders, who on their well-publicized departure from Atlanta found a mob as the reception committee in Montgomery. The threat of a bomb that supposedly was hidden in the bus terminal gave police the excuse for not permitting the Freedom Riders to enter the Montgomery depot. It was being cleared for bomb searching.

Upon arrival in Jackson, Mississippi, the Walkers and their companions were promptly arrested and, as the papers have reported, their stay in jail were quite rigorous. Upon their release, a controversy broke out between Jackson law-enforcing officials and the Walkers. A \$275 ring and \$75 in currency were missing when the jailers returned the belongings to the prisoners. When Walker made these losses public, the Jackson authorities attempted to put the blame upon Negro trustees. However, the latest word from the sheriff is that the Mrs. Walker will get her wedding ring and money or the sheriff himself will make them good.

VIGNETTE OF THE MONTH

Abernathy of Montgomery

The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy was in Atlanta at the home office of SCLC over the weekend of July 7th and he looked tired. He had a right to appear this way, for there are few men in America who have taken the battering that Abernathy has. As the world knows, Abernathy was second in command every step of the Montgomery bus boycott. Then, when Martin Luther King, Jr., shifted his base of operation to Atlanta, Abernathy became commander-in-chief of the famous MIA (Montgomery Improvement Association.) This meant that he was now the principal target of the segregationists — and this often meant the law-enforcing as well as lawless elements. Too, hardly a week passed without some direct or snide abuse by the local press.

Last spring Abernathy was in the midst of the anti-jim crow demonstrations that rocked the campus of Alabama State College. He did all that he could to prevent the slaughter of academic freedom — but in vain. There before his eyes, he saw faculty members kicked out and students expelled and those who remained shackled by self-incriminating oaths and a system of espionage and surveillance.

Because of an advertisement in the *New York Times* in the interest of fund raising for the defense of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the sit-in students, Abernathy, Rev. Joseph E. Lowery of Mobile and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham — all SCLC Board members and the Rev. S. S. Seay, Sr. of the MIA — were sued by Montgomery officials and the Governor of Alabama. When the all-white juries in local courts decided that the integration leaders had libeled city officials, Abernathy was stripped of his few worldly possessions. His joint interest, with his sisters and brothers in the family farm homestead that has been established by their parents, was seized and sold as was his automobile, though it was joint property of his wife.

When the Freedom Riders pushed through the Montgomery mob, Abernathy was right there. His church — First Baptist — was the object of the young hoodlum mass assault that brought forth the first action of the U.S. Marshals.

When he, Wyatt Walker, Shuttlesworth, Bernard Lee and others were seeing off a contingent of Freedom Riders to Mississippi, they decided to eat at the bus station restaurant. To their surprise, they were arrested, even though a similar group had eaten there the day before.

Abernathy was asked about things in Montgomery. He answered that the Freedom Rides had helped greatly. Despite the violence, Negroes, along with whites, are now using the general waiting rooms at transportation depots and though reluctantly, officials and depot managers are taking down the "white" and "colored" signs. Local people are encouraged by the bravery and success of "the outsiders." However, the lid is still down on Alabama State College. Although students from all over the nation are participants, to date not a single 'Bama State student or teacher has joined a Freedom Ride!

Abernathy laughs when he recounts some of his experiences in jail. True to the spirit of nonviolence, the Freedom Riders won over other prison inmates and soon had them singing the songs of freedom. "By now," Abernathy chuckles, "the movement has no doubt spread through the prison camps of the whole sovereign state of Alabama."

When the jailers put into a cell section with the Freedom Riders a prisoner whom they hoped would upset and perhaps assault the non-violenters, the first night he raised such a ruckus that nobody could sleep. However, the next day when he recognized Rev. Abernathy, he, too, joined the movement and thereafter threw his fits against the guards and jailers.

Despite adversity, good fortune has occasionally smiled on Abernathy. He has been given a new automobile by the joint effort of the people of Montgomery and California. The Victory Baptist Church of Los Angeles, Dr. A. A. Peters pastor, made the presentation of a 1961 Electra Buick. (His old car was a '56 Century Buick.)

Even better news than that, the Federal District Court at Montgomery has ruled that Abernathy, Lowery, Shuttlesworth and Seay were fraudulently held responsible for the *New York Times* ad by those officials who were suing them. The three SCLC leaders and the Rev. Seay are now free of suits pending and probably will be able to recover damages for the judgment that has been executed against them. The two suits that were lost in the lower Alabama courts are now being appealed.

Rev. Abernathy has received a call from the West Hunter Baptist Church of Atlanta. This is an attractive offer. As we go to press, he is still pondering this difficult decision. If Abernathy should leave Alabama, it will be a terrible loss. Like Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, he has become such a bulwark of courage and fortitude that it would be most difficult to replace him.

Record of Suffering

It is surprising that so little writing has come out of the travail and imprisonment of what is presumed to be part of the most articulate sector of our society. College youths and other intellectuals, preachers, and teachers are regarded as specialists, who are endowed with talents and abilities for reading and writing — not to mention speaking. And yet few poems, essays, pamphlets and books have appeared from the pens of participants in the civil rights struggle. And this includes the Sit-Ins and Freedom Rides. The usual account that the public reads is done by some journalist. This is very well but quite different from what a participant himself would write.

In the light of this general condition, we are all thankful to the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker. Not only did he keep a diary while he was in jail in Montgomery, but has also written up and submitted to the Department of Justice a clear and succinct account of what he and his fellow passengers underwent during their Freedom Ride from Atlanta to Jackson, Mississippi.

Moreover, Rev. Walker and his wife, Ann, exchanged notes by way of trustees and other messengers while they were in the Jackson jail. This correspondence gives striking sidelights on living conditions there. The *Afro-American* and the *Atlanta Inquirer* have published some of these letters and leaves from the Walker diary.

We ask all 'jailbirds' — of the Sit-Ins and Freedom Rides especially — to write us a long letter, telling about the treatment, good and bad, to which they were subjected and above all, their own thoughts and feelings while confined.

We will be happy to publish these singly or as a collection, if the response lives up to expectations. For example, wouldn't it be wonderful to know what Jim Lawson was thinking while he was behind the bars or what are the details that caused Jim Farmer to issue the public statement that his stay in the Mississippi prison tried his very faith in human nature.

SCLC NEWS LETTER

Publisher, SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

208 Auburn Avenue

Atlanta, Georgia

Phone: JACKSON 5-1763

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., President

F. L. SHUTTLESWORTH, Secretary

RALPH D. ABERNATHY, Treasurer

WYATT TEE WALKER, Executive Director

L. D. REDDICK, Acting Editor

UNITY

Briefs . . .

Farewell:

Mrs. Ernestine Brown, who for two years served as a devoted secretary in SCLC's home office, has moved over to the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation at Marietta, Georgia, where she has helped make a break-through to positions previously denied Negroes.

Hail:

Mrs. Virginia McCarton Brown, A.B. degree from Clark College, Atlanta, has joined SCLC office staff as clerk-typist.

Mrs. Edwina Hudson Smith, native Atlantan, recently returned from California, has been appointed manager of the SCLC home office. She reveals that she attended both San Francisco State College and the University of California at Berkeley where she studied sociology and anthropology and engaged in modern and primitive dancing during her leisure hours.

Bernard Lee, leader of the nationally famous anti-jim crow demonstrations of Alabama State College students and presently continuing his education at Morris Brown College, Atlanta, has given valuable assistance to the SCLC staff — especially with the Freedom Rides.

Marion Barry, one of Fisk University's great contributions to the Sit-In movement, has the difficult assignment of field work for SCLC in Mississippi. Diane Nash and Charles Sherrod of SNCC were also part of operation Mississippi.

Standbys:

Two other SCLC staff members have been with the organization so long now that they are "old-reliables" rather than "new comers." Miss Dora Edith McDonald became secretary to Dr.

King on November 1, 1960. For a half dozen years she had been secretary to J. B. Blayton, Sr., head of the Mutual Federal Savings and Loan Association. Miss McDonald holds the B.S. in Business Administration from South Carolina State College, and collects antique china in her spare time.

She succeeded Mrs. Maude L. Ballou, who had served Dr. King through the dark days of the famous Montgomery bus boycott. After four devoted years to MIA and afterwards to SCLC, Mrs. Ballou accompanied her family when it moved to Virginia last fall.

Mrs. Lillie A. Hunter is another alumna of the Montgomery struggle. She was Dr. King's secretary at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where her record-keeping was so efficient that she was invited to become the bookkeeper for SCLC. She accepted the position on March 7, 1960. After working hours, she plays progressive jazz records and writes poetry.

The work of our field representative, the Rev. Harry Blake, has been outstanding in Louisiana. Not only has he assisted many mothers of fatherless children in getting restored to the public welfare rolls but Rev. Blake gave invaluable assistance to the federal civil right commission's investigation of voter discrimination and disfranchisement. Not only did he himself testify but he secured many affidavits and persuaded several persons to run the risk of presenting at an open hearing evidence of malpractice on the part of Louisiana officials who handle registration and voting.

Of our affiliates, the state of Virginia seems to be forging ahead. It is now in process of setting up as a state office under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Milton Reid.



Left to right: James Farmer, CORE, Martin Luther King and Wyatt Tee Walker, SCLC and Ed King, SNCC (not shown in picture) helped set up a coordinating committee on the Freedom Rides that represents all three organizations.

CONTRIBUTIONS

I wish to contribute to the work of SCLC and the social struggle in the South.

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