

Notes by Lawrence Dunbar Reddick
on SCLC Administrative Committee Meetings
on 2 April and 3 April 1959

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Upon King's return from India, he attended two administrative committee meetings in Montgomery during which the organization grappled with its financial troubles and lack of direction. The committee decided to fire executive director John Tilley immediately and possibly hire Bayard Rustin. The following notes by Reddick recount a discussion between King and Ella Baker in which "she gave him the devil for not spending more time with the SCLC." Reddick recalls telling King in India that "he must devote himself full time to Crusading and thus give up his church and all other means of assured income" but concludes that "he will never do this. . . . He will continue to be a crusader in a gray flannel suit."

I'll have to check the dates a little later but two meetings have been held in Martin's office that revealed developments that should be noted. The first meeting was the administrative committee of SCLC on the question of what to do about the present problems and future of that organization. Present were [I. M.] Augustine and [James A.] Smith from New Orleans, Lowry [Joseph Lowery] from Mobile, Sam Williams from Atlanta, [Fred] Shuttlesworth and the man who drove him down from Birmingham, Abernathy, King and myself. Abernathy was so late that he held up the meeting at least an hour. He did the same thing the following day. The out-of-town people wondered why he right here in Montgomery could not get to the meetings on time. There was a good joke that when the chariot came to take Abernathy and King to town it would have to pick them up on a delayed schedule. Martin didn't like this too much and protested that he was ready to start the meeting on time but that the people did not get there so that he could do so.

It was decided that the office would be cut down one half, letting Tilley and Miss Fisher, who was working with the Atlanta ~~Board of~~ Voter Registration Committee, go, retaining Miss Baker at a reduced salary and the girl in the office.¹

Martin brought up the question of using Bayard Rustin. He praised him for his ability and his contacts. I pointed out the dangers of the "enemy" using his record to smear SCLC and that if we used him it should be done unofficially.² In praising R, King and Abernathy recalled that he brought \$10,000 down with him during the bus boycott. Abernathy said that he was afraid for him with so much money. I need to find out who sent that money and what became of it because I believe

1. For more on Judith Fisher's work for SCLC, see King to Jesse Hill, Jr., 28 January 1959, pp. 114-115 in this volume. The office "girl" is probably Ernestine Brown.

2. Rustin had been involved in the Young Communist League during the 1930s. In 1953, he was arrested for homosexual activity in Pasadena, California. SCLC leaders also discussed Rustin's hiring at their fall meeting (see King, Recommendations to SCLC Committee on Future Program, 27 October 1959, pp. 315-318 in this volume).

Apr that Pierce or Nixon told me that they were afraid to accept the money because
1959 it had a red taint.³ Emory O. Jackson at this point or later attacked R as a com-
munist though this is not true.⁴

In our first days meeting Sam Williams' assault upon Tilley, I felt was too much. I feel that Americans abuse each other more than is necessary. Martin reported that a member of Tilley's church in Baltimore had taken a shot after him. I wondered how a man as mild as Tilley could make someone so angry as to shoot at him.

We had ~~hit~~ missed two pay days, each of two weeks and upon my recommendation worked out a budget covering all debts due and expected for the next two or three months and on the basis of that float alone. This I learned was done subsequently.

Shuttlesworth now seems to be a little mature but he is still impulsive, over active and fearless. To my surprise he is actually devoted to non-violence than Sam Williams. Sam says that if he catches anybody "monkeying around" his yard he's going to take his gun and leave some of him there. While Suttlesworth says that we need to get non-violence into our preachers because most of them don't really understand it. This he said on his own initiative and I think he means it.

On the second day Ella Baker came down to see King and both of them privately had asked me to sit in and since some of the committee members were still in town Martin asked them to sit in, too. I had given her some indication of the line that I was going to persue and had done the same with Martin.

She really came to lay him out and abuse him. She gave him the devil for not spending more time with the SCLC. I raised the question as to whether, honestly, the director and his staff of SCLC felt free to go ahead for we at the Atlanta Board Meeting had specifically given Tilley and Miss Baker a blank check.⁵ We told them to make statements to the press and that we would back them up in whatever they did or said even if they made mistakes. Still [*strikeout illegible*] almost nothing came out in the papers. She put the blame for this on Tilley.

Next when she was telling King [*strikeout illegible*] that perhaps she spent too much time in speaking everywhere on every subject, he protested. When I said that possibly she meant that aside from speaking to raise money for SCLC or MIA that he should reserve his time for working with SCLC, he protested with a feeling of hurt. He said that an artist should not be denied his means of expression. That he liked to preach and felt that he should do it. It was almost touching the way he said it and at that point I became convinced that he of himself does not have the [*toughness?*] to say no when these invitations flood in on him. He keeps saying that he wants an administrative assistance but as Miss Baker told him Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph and all the other big shots have the same problem and they themselves have to decide to say no to most of the invitations they re-

3. James E. Pierce was a member of the MIA executive board, and E. D. Nixon was the group's first treasurer.

4. Jackson was the managing editor of the *Birmingham World*, Alabama's leading black newspaper.

5. Reddick likely refers to the 2-3 January meeting of the Committee on the Future Program of SCLC held at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

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ceive; that nobody else but them can make that decision. I don't believe that Martin will be able to severely discipline himself this way.

Over seas when he raised the question with me I had said to him that either he must devote himself ~~to~~ full time to Crusading and thus give up his church and all other means of assured income and let his family and himself depend upon whatever people would do for him for his and their lively-hood. I know that he will never do this. ~~so~~ So M. L. K will never become a Vinoba Bhave.⁶ He will continue to be a crusader in a gray flannel suit.

Now that Ella is in charge herself, she cannot put the blame on anybody. She will have to reduce. I believe that she has more ability [*than?*] Tilley but I wonder if she hasn't complained so long in life that it has become a habit with her. She, too, has a tendency to come ~~to~~ late to things and we'll see how she promotes the Mboya dinner, the Tallahassee Conference and whether she is able to get the sororities of Atlanta make sizable contributions.⁷

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6. Vinoba Bhave was widely considered to be Gandhi's spiritual successor. King met Vinoba on 2-3 March in India. For more on their meeting, see King, Farewell Statement for All India Radio, 9 March 1959, pp. 135-136 in this volume; see also Vinoba Bhave, "Dr. Martin Luther King with Vinoba," *Bhoodan* 3 (18 March 1959): 369-370.

7. Kenyan independence leader Tom Mboya addressed an SCLC-sponsored dinner in Atlanta on 13 May. In notes written following the event, Reddick mentioned that "in so far as I know no money has come in from the frats and sororities" (Reddick, "Mboya dinner at Atlanta," 14 May 1959; see also King, Remarks Delivered at Africa Freedom Dinner at Atlanta University, 13 May 1959, pp. 203-204 in this volume). For more on the Tallahassee Conference, see Statement Adopted at Spring Session of SCLC, 15 May 1959, pp. 205-208 in this volume.