

D. Roy Wilkins of NAACP meets with DeLoach to discuss allegations about Dr. King: November 27, 1964

On November 24, 1964, Director Hoover gave a speech at Loyola University in Chicago in which he referred to moral laxness in civil rights group. On November 27, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of NAACP, phoned DeLoach and requested a meeting. Wilkins told the Committee that he had been disturbed by Hoover's Loyola University speech a few days before, and that he had realized Hoover had been referring to Dr. King because of rumors then circulating that the FBI had developed "derogatory" material about Dr. King. Wilkins was spurred into meeting with DeLoach by pointed inquiries from several reporters about whether Director Hoover's remarks had been directed toward Dr. King. Wilkins described his motivation in requesting the meeting as "protecting the civil rights movement." He said that Dr. King did not learn of his meeting with DeLoach until over a week after it had occurred.³⁵⁷

DeLoach and Wilkins have given the Committee differing accounts of what was said at their meeting. DeLoach's version is summarized in a letter that he sent to President Johnson on November 30, 1964:

Wilkins said that . . . the ruination of King would spell the downfall of the entire civil rights movement . . . Wilkins indicated that [if allegations concerning King's personal conduct and supposed connections with communists were publicized], many of his Negro associates would rise to his defense. He felt, however, that many white people who believe in the civil rights movement and who yearly contribute from \$500 to \$50,000 to this movement would immediately cease their financial support. This loss, coupled with the loss of faith in King by millions of Americans, would halt any further progress of the civil rights movement.³⁵⁸

A memorandum by DeLoach written shortly after the meeting states:

I told him . . . that if King wanted war we certainly would give it to him. Wilkins shook his head and stated there was no doubt in his mind as to which side would lose if the FBI really came out with all its ammunition against King. I told him the ammunition was plentiful and that while we were not responsible for the many rumors being initiated against King, we had heard of these rumors and were certainly in a position to substantiate them.³⁵⁹

DeLoach's memorandum stated that the meeting had concluded with Wilkins' promise to "tell King that he can't win in a battle with the FBI and that the best thing for him to do is to retire from public life."

Wilkins told the Committee that DeLoach's description of the meeting was "self serving and filled with inaccuracies" and denied DeLoach's description of his remarks as "pure invention."³⁶⁰ Wilkins stated that he had expressed his concern that accusations about Dr. King would cripple the civil rights movement, noting that if charges

³⁵⁷ Staff summary, Roy Wilkins interview, 11/23/75, p. 1.

³⁵⁸ Letter, Hoover to President, 11/30/64.

³⁵⁹ Memorandum from Cartha DeLoach to John Mohr, 11/27/64, p. 2.

³⁶⁰ Wilkins staff summary, 11/23/75, p. 2.

were publicly levied against Dr. King, the black community would side with Dr. King and the white community with Director Hoover. Wilkins said that he advised DeLoach that the FBI should not overreact to Dr. King's criticisms and that he considered Dr. King's criticism of the FBI's failure to vigorously enforce the civil rights laws to be totally justified. Wilkins told the Committee that although he had considered the meeting a "success" at the time, after reading DeLoach's memorandum he realized that he had failed to convey the impression that he had intended, since DeLoach had clearly misinterpreted his remarks.³⁶¹

When DeLoach was asked by the Committee if the "ammunition" he had threatened to use against Dr. King was the tape recordings, DeLoach replied, "I don't know what I had in mind, frankly, it's been so long ago, I can't recall."³⁶² Wilkins did not remember DeLoach's use of the term "ammunition," but did recall that DeLoach frequently alluded to "derogatory information," although Wilkins was unclear whether DeLoach was referring to allegations about Dr. King's personal conduct or about Communist infiltration of the SCLC.³⁶³

The following day, an official of the Domestic Intelligence Division proposed to William Sullivan, head of the Division, that several leading members of the Black community should be briefed about Dr. King by the FBI "on a highly confidential basis." It was proposed that "the use of a tape, such as contemplated in your memorandum, together with a transcript for convenience in following the tape," should be used.

"The inclusion of U.S. Government officials, such as Carl Rowan or Ralph Bunch, is not suggested as they might feel a duty to advise the White House of such contemplated meeting. . . . This group should include such leadership as would be capable of removing King from the scene if they, of their own volition, decided this was the thing to do after such a briefing."^{363a}

E. Dr. King and Director Hoover Meet: December 1, 1964

According to one of Dr. King's legal counsels, Harry Wachtel, several prominent civil rights leaders told Dr. King of their concern that public controversy with Director Hoover would hurt the civil rights movement, but promised to support Dr. King should such a confrontation occur. Wachtel recalled that Dr. King and his staff pondered "how to defuse this and prevent it from becoming the principal focus of the struggle. Hoover versus King," which "could only have lead to a division and thus a dilution of the growing strength of the civil rights movement." Wachtel testified:

Everything pointed toward the problem of how Hoover would respond if Dr. King said in effect, "you're a liar; prove your case. If you call me a liar, prove it." Every lawyer worth his salt knows this is the beginning of the Alger Hiss type of dilemma. Libel and slander litigation or public debate of

³⁶¹ Wilkins (staff summary), 11/23/75, p. 2.

³⁶² Cartha DeLoach testimony, 11/25/75, p. 173.

³⁶³ Wilkins (staff summary), 11/23/75, p. 2.

^{363a} (Memorandum from J. A. Sizoo to W. C. Sullivan, 12/1/64.)