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TASK IS DIFFICULT, EX-AIDE DECLARES

Conference Continues Plan for Memorial March Set in Memphis on Monday

By EARL CALDWELL
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MEMPHIS, April 5 — The mantle of leadership in the nonviolent struggle by Negroes for civil rights, held so long by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was passed today to the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, who for years was Dr. King's close friend and trusted aide.

As tears welled in his eyes, Mr. Abernathy said it was "an awesome task" that he now faced. But he said that "as difficult as the task may be, we must move forward."

Mr. Abernathy then stressed that under his leadership, Dr. King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, would not abandon the nonviolent path that it had always followed. "We're all willing to die for what we believe in," he said.

Mr. Abernathy spoke at an early morning news conference in the courtyard at the Lorraine Motel. He faced a throng of newsmen while sitting solemnly at a table situated beneath the balcony where Dr. King had stood the night before when he was felled by a sniper's bullet.

As his first order of business, Mr. Abernathy promised that the S.C.L.C. staff would return to Memphis on Monday and conduct the march that Dr. King had planned to lead in support of the city's striking sanitation men.

He said that it would be a "silent march" in memory of Dr. King. And while Mr. Abernathy spoke, supporters from across the country had already begun to arrive in the city to join in the march, which has now taken on nationwide significance.

And after a "necessary period of readjustment," Mr. Abernathy said, S.C.L.C. would resume work on Dr. King's plans for a Poor People's Campaign in Washington.

Flanked by Aides

As he made his statement, Mr. Abernathy was flanked by the Rev. Andrew J. Young and the Rev. Bernard Lee of the S.C.L.C. staff. Another half-dozen of Dr. King's aides stood close behind.

As they had all through the long night, Dr. King's aides told each other to "stand tall." To friends, they used Dr. King's famous phrase: "Nobody's going to turn us around."

While the merits of a non-violent movement were being argued all about them, Mr. Abernathy and his executive staff members never wavered in their pledge.

"We call upon you," Mr. Abernathy said, "to join us in working for those things for which he [Dr. King] lived and died. He gave his life in the cause of nonviolence. He knew the power present in the actively organized souls of men. We must not lose sight of that power in our grief and despair."

Leave for Atlanta

Mr. Abernathy said that violence would dishonor Dr. King, "for he sought redemption of man, not vengeance."

Shortly after the 8 A.M. news conference, all the S.C.L.C. staff members who had been stationed here joined in a tightly guarded caravan to the airport, where they met Dr. King's wife and then flew back to Atlanta with the body of Dr. King.

According to Mr. Young, it was Dr. King himself who had restructured the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference almost two years ago to "make sure that we would carry on when he

was gone."

He said that back then, Dr. King had asked that the title of vice president at large be bestowed on Mr. Abernathy. He said that Dr. King was blunt in telling his staff that it "would have to recognize that some day he would not be here to carry on."

Just after 1:30 A.M. today, the entire S.C.L.C. staff went into a lengthy strategy session that did not end until shortly before dawn. However, after the meeting, Mr. Young said that it was "unquestioned" that Mr. Abernathy would take over. He said that Mr. Abernathy would be formally installed as S.C.L.C. chairman at the organization's next board meeting.

Mr. Young also revealed that Dr. King, just before the assassination, had given the S.C.L.C. staff his strongest lecture ever on nonviolence as a necessary tactic in the civil rights movement.

"He laid it on the line," Mr. Young said. "For the first time he said that nobody should be on the staff who did not believe in nonviolence at least as a tactic."

At the start of his news conference here this morning, Mr. Abernathy called the occasion "one of the darkest hours in the history of our nation." And he admitted that he trembled as he moved forward to accept his new role of leadership in the civil rights movement.

"No man," he said, "can fill Dr. King's shoes."