

After King

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His Deputy Carries On His Work

ATLANTA—In those hours just after the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., stunned witnesses stood around at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, quietly debating the future of nonviolence in the civil rights movement. "This movement is finished," a young Negro man said. "You can say that non-violence ended right here."

Others shared the same thought. The movement could not survive, they felt, without the charismatic leadership of Dr. King. "The movement," someone else said, "died with him."

The next morning when the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy came forward to accept the challenge as Dr. King's successor, their fears were only strengthened. Mr. Abernathy had stood at Dr. King's side for years. And it was Dr. King himself who had made certain that if anything were to happen to him, it would be Mr. Abernathy who would step into his place. But Mr. Abernathy did not appear ready. He seemed un-

sure of himself and too hurt by the violent death of his friend to take up the challenge that was laid out for him.

But by the middle of last week, he was presenting another image. For the first time, he exuded confidence. He showed toughness and determination. And he also made it clear that no matter what anyone felt, he would not stand aside. "I don't have to tell you that I am the leader," he shouted to an enthusiastic rally in Memphis that was celebrating the sanitation men's strike victory. "Baby," he said, "I am going to show you."

Greater Militancy

Apparently, Mr. Abernathy will use the project that Dr. King had designed, the Poor People's campaign in Washington, to test his leadership. And if early indications prove correct, he will lead the Southern Christian Leadership Conference off on a course of greater militancy. "I think you will find," an associate of Mr. Abernathy said, "that he

will not be as reasonable as Dr. King was. He cannot afford to be."

Already, Mr. Abernathy has promised "the most militant and aggressive nonviolent war ever waged by the civil rights movement" in Washington. "We don't have any guns or billy clubs," he said, "but you had better get out of our way."

Many persons believe that the militance which Mr. Abernathy speaks of, and is certain to demonstrate, reflects his belief that the nonviolent movement, if it is to survive, must now produce significant gains.

But they also see S.C.L.C. taking a tougher stand in an effort to attract new support, particularly among the young activists. "Dr. King used an intellectual approach," they point out. "But that isn't Abernathy's style. He needs something else. Maybe he can make it up with militancy."

But while the S.C.L.C. approach may be altered, its goals seem set. Before his death, Dr. King

had become convinced that the roots of the nation's racial ills lay in the immense economic problems. And it was his opinion that the spotlight should not be just on the Negro poor but on all poverty in America. Thus, in his Poor People's Campaign he sought to build a great coalition, black and white together.

While Mr. Abernathy has been blunt in his criticism of white racism, he has repeatedly made the point that Dr. King did not give his life just for the Negro poor but "for the millions of poor people just like you."

Inside S.C.L.C., members of Mr. Abernathy's inner circle, the same group that served Dr. King, realize that the greatest task now is to discourage comparison. "You have to let him be his own

man," they say of Mr. Abernathy. "He is not Martin Luther King and if he is going to be able to accomplish anything, he has to have the opportunity to be himself."

When Dr. King was shot, it was Mr. Abernathy who was first at his side. "He couldn't talk," Mr. Abernathy said. "But he just looked into my eyes for a long time. He talked to me through his eyes." Mr. Abernathy believes that Dr. King was asking him then to carry on.

"I'll show you that I am the leader," he says bluntly and promises: "We will get to the promised land. It will happen in my time and under my leadership."

—EARL CALDWELL