

II. THE ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION

A. Events Surrounding April 4, 1968

1. The Poor People's Campaign

To understand the movements of Dr. King during this critical period, it is necessary to briefly discuss the Poor People's Campaign (POCAM), originally called the Washington Spring Project in which he and the SCLC were involved. POCAM was scheduled to begin the first week of April 1968, and involved recruiting some 3,000 poor unemployed blacks from 16 localities in the United States for the purpose of going to Washington, D.C., and petitioning the government to improve their economic status (HQ 157-8428-51).

The plan was to camp on the Washington Monument or Lincoln Memorial grounds (HQ 157-8428-132). During the first and second weeks, demands would be made of congressmen and heads of departments, such as the Secretary of Labor. If the demands were not met, nonviolent demonstrations were to be conducted (HQ 157-8428-109).

Dr. King's planned travel schedule for February and March included trips to 9 major cities and visits to various points in Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia (HQ 157 8428-75). By mid February Dr. King had become discouraged with the lack of progress in recruiting and

training demonstrators (HQ 157-8428-206). During this low point in the POCAM Dr. King was persuaded to alter his plans and to go to Memphis, Tennessee, in support of a strike involving the city's sanitation workers.

2. Memphis Sanitation Worker's Strike

On February 12, 1968, approximately 1,000 sanitation workers employed by the city of Memphis called a wildcat strike. The strikers were represented by Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees who demanded exclusive recognition of the union as bargaining agent, setting up grievance procedures, wage improvements, payroll deduction of union dues, and a promotion system as well as a pension, hospitalization and life insurance program. (HQ 157-9146-X1).

The NAACP intervened in the strike because all of the sanitation workers, excluding drivers, were black. A militant young black power group known as the Invaders was similarly interested in the strike. The group consisted of about 15 members, mostly high school dropouts, and was a cell of a larger group known as Black Organizing Power (BOP) headed by Charles L. Cabbage and John B. Smith. The alleged purpose of BOP was to stimulate a sense of black identity, black pride and black consciousness in young blacks.

The strikers were also supported by a group of black ministers, connected with the Memphis Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, who adopted the name COME (Community on the Move for Equality). It was members of this group that were instrumental in bringing Dr. King to Memphis. On March 3, 1968, the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr., pastor of the Centenary Methodist Church, Memphis, and member of COME, stated on a television program (WMBQ-TV) that he wanted to bring Dr. King (and other heads of civil rights organizations) to Memphis in an effort to unify the entire black community behind the demands of the strikers (HQ 157-9146-X23). The intervention of these various black community organizations caused the city of Memphis to be concerned about the racial overtones of the strike and the possibility of violence (HQ 157-9146-X1).

Dr. King made his first visit to Memphis in support of the strike on the night of March 18, 1968. On that occasion, in addressing an estimated crowd of 9,000 to 12,000 people at a rally sponsored by COME at the Mason Temple, he called for a general protest day on March 22, 1968. All blacks were asked not to go to work or school on that day and were urged to participate in a massive downtown march. Dr. King and his party stayed at the Lorraine Motel, 406 Mulberry Street, on

the night of March 18, 1968 and left Memphis shortly before noon on March 19, 1968, ostensibly to go to the State of Mississippi in connection with the POCAM (HQ 157-9146-X39).

The City of Memphis was virtually paralyzed by a 16-inch snowfall on March 22, 1968, resulting in the postponement of the planned mass march to March 28, 1968. Dr. King returned to Memphis on the 28th, arriving at the airport at approximately 10:22a.m. By that time approximately 5,000 to 6,000 people, about half of whom were of school age, had congregated at the Clayborn Temple (located at 280 Hernando St.) for the start of the march. According to the plan of the march, the sanitation workers were in front with the remainder of the people following behind. The march was to proceed north on Hernando to Beale Street, thence west on Beale Street to Main Street and north on Main Street to City Hall.

The march got underway at approximately 11:00a.m. and had proceeded to Hernando and Beale before it was joined by Dr. King. When the front of the march (led by Dr. King) reached Main Street, teenagers and young adults at the rear of the march near Third and Beale (two blocks from the front of the march) ripped the signs off their poles and began breaking store windows and looting. Mass confusion developed and the police moved in to quell the disturbance. The

disruption of the march caused Dr. King's aides to commandeer an automobile, and Dr. King and his party were escorted by police to the Rivermont Hotel operated by Holiday Inns of America. (HQ 157-9146-45). Dr. King left the march at 11:15a.m. and checked into the Rivermont Hotel at 11:24a.m. where he stayed until March 29, 1968. Dr. King and his party were scheduled to return to Atlanta on March 28, 1968, at 9:05p.m. via Eastern Airlines and were scheduled to leave Atlanta the morning of March 29, 1968, for Baltimore (HQ 157-9146-45). Thus, remaining in Memphis on the night of the 28th was a change in plans.

The city ordered a 7:00p.m. curfew and approximately 3,500 members of the Tennessee National Guard were called out to end the violence. During the disturbance four blacks were shot, one fatally; approximately 150 fires were set; and over 300 persons were arrested. Approximately one percent of the marchers engaged in looting and violence and many of these were people who were criminally inclined and who had been in previous trouble. The March 29, 1968, issue of the Memphis "Commercial Appeal" reported that many of the looters and window breakers were black power advocates and that several wore jackets of the "Invaders". However, other sources, including Lieutenant E.H. Arkin of the Memphis Police Department, indicated that

many high school age students had put the word "Invaders" on their jackets for effect and were not necessarily affiliated with the BOP movement (HQ 157-9146-45). The violence and disruption of the march was of great concern to Dr. King because of the possible effect it might have on the planned POCAM. Therefore, he vowed to return to Memphis and demonstrate that he had not lost his effectiveness in leading nonviolent marches.

Dr. King, together with his SCLC staff, returned to Memphis on April 3, 1968, at 10:33a.m. After a press conference at the airport, the group proceeded to the Lorraine Motel, arriving there at approximately 11:20a.m. At about 12:05p.m. Dr. King left the Lorraine Motel for a meeting at the Centenary Methodist Church (Security and Surveillance Rept. of G.P. Tines, Inspector, Memphis Police Department, dated July 17, 1968). Dr. King announced at this meeting that his purpose in returning to Memphis was to lead a mass march on April 8, 1968 (HQ 157-9146-9 p.8).

However, on April 3, 1968, United States District Court Judge Bailey Brown issued a temporary restraining order against further marches in Memphis (HQ 157-9146-9, p.1). Dr. King returned to the Lorraine Motel at 2:25p.m. and sometime that afternoon Federal Marshals served him and his aides with

the restraining order. (Security and Surveillance Rept. of G.P. Tines, Inspector, Memphis Police Department, dated July 17, 1968).

At approximately 4:00p.m. Dr. King and the SCLC staff met with the BOP group at which time Charles Cabbage requested money to institute BOP plans to start a "Liberation School" and a "Black Co-op". Dr. King agreed to use his influence to secure funds for BOP and Rev. Andrew Young agreed to help write up a plan. It is believed these concessions were made to BOP in order to keep them in line and prevent them from following a violent pattern. (HQ 157-9146-9, p.9)

On the night of April 3, 1968, Dr. King spoke to approximately 2,000 persons at the Mason Temple. He emphasized that the scheduled mass march must be held on April 8, 1968, to re-focus attention on the eight-week old sanitation workers strike. X

After the speech, Solomon Jones, Jr., serving as Dr. King's chauffeur drove him back to the Lorraine Motel. Dr. King told Jones to report back on Thursday morning, April 4, 1968, at 8:30a.m. because he had to appear in court in connection with a restraining order. (Memphis 44-1987-2322 p.51.)