



In Reply, Please Refer to  
File No.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Memphis, Tennessee

March 19, 1968

RE: SANITATION WORKERS STRIKE,  
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE  
RACIAL MATTERS

Reference is made to communication dated March 18, 1968, made at Memphis, Tennessee.

On the afternoon of March 18, 1968, Capt. Jewell G. Ray, Inspectional Bureau, Memphis, Tennessee, Police Department, advised that there was little strike support activity during the day of March 18, 1968, and that some of the strikers and some of their adult supporters sponsored by a group of Negro Memphis ministers connected with the Memphis Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and who have adopted the name of Community on the Move for Equality (COME) held a downtown march peacefully on the sidewalks, single file, around 3:00 p.m. March 18, 1968. He advised that at about 4:30 p.m. a small group of teenagers marched the same route without incident.

Capt. Ray stated that the big excitement in Memphis on March 18, 1968, was the scheduled appearance of Martin Luther King Jr. of Atlanta, Georgia, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who had been scheduled to address a strike support rally sponsored by COME at Mason Temple, Mason Avenue, Memphis, this being a Church of God in Christ institution. He stated that outside of the Mid-South Coliseum, it is the largest indoor arena in Memphis and can seat some 10,000 people.

On the late night of March 18, 1968, Capt. Ray advised that King had appeared, arriving late, after 9:00 p.m., and he was accompanied on the platform by Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, who is reported to be Vice-President at Large of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

- 11 - Bureau
  - 1 - USA, Memphis
  - 1 - Secret Service, Memphis
  - 1 - G-2
  - 1 - OSI
  - 1 - NISO, Charlotte
  - 1 - NISO, Memphis
  - 1 - 111th MI, Memphis
  - 1 - 111th MI, Nashville
  - ⑨ - Memphis
- WHL:LF  
(28)

1 - 157-1092; 1 - 157-556; 1 - 170-98; 1 - 157-109;  
1 - 157- [redacted] 1 - 157-166; 1 - 100-4105;  
1 - 100-4492; 1 - 170-70-Sub)

157-1092-117



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In the group accompanying King to Memphis were Andrew J. Young, Executive Director of SCLC, and James Bevel, a member of the executive staff of SCLC.

Rev. James Morris Lawson Jr., Pastor, Centenary Methodist Church, Memphis, according to Ray, is understood to also be on the executive staff of SCLC and was the person purportedly responsible for bringing King and his group to Memphis to stimulate support of the sanitation strike.

Ray stated that he had been reliably informed that at the meeting on the night of March 18, 1968, King made an impassioned speech to an estimated crowd of 9,000 to 12,000 people, predominantly Negroes, who showed up to hear him. King called for an escalation of the strike and for support thereof. King made a series of demagogic appeals to the baser emotions of the predominantly Negro audience and pointed out they had to acquire more economic goods now possessed by the white man and that they had to obtain power. He kept emphasizing power without becoming specific as to how they could obtain power. Ray stated that the audience was emotionally moved by King's speech, and King concluded by calling for a unified effort on the part of all Negroes in Memphis, some 250,000, to oppose the Memphis city administration headed by Mayor Henry Loeb who heretofore has refused to accept a union dues checkoff which is the big bottleneck in the settlement of the sanitation strike, which has been in progress since February 12, 1968. King called on all Negroes in Memphis to utilize Friday, March 22, 1968, as a protest day in which all Negroes would refuse to show up for work and all Negro students would refuse to go to school and that all Negroes would thereby be urged to come into downtown Memphis for what King described as a massive downtown march.

King indicated that he would be in Mississippi for the next several days stimulating support for his forthcoming April 22, 1968, "Poor People's Camp-In" in Washington, D. C., and would probably return to Memphis in time to participate in the scheduled massive march on March 22, 1968.

Ray stated that Ralph D. Abernathy made a talk in which he urged strike supporters and strike sympathizers to physically place their bodies in front of the some 60-odd Memphis Sanitation Department pick-up trucks which are currently collecting garbage in Memphis during the strike, even

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if this provoked arrest.

On March 19, 1968, Lt. E. H. Arkin, Inspectional Bureau, Memphis Police Department, and Inspector G. P. Tines, Inspectional Bureau, Memphis Police Department, advised that there had been no known arrests on the part of people throwing themselves in front of sanitation trucks, and there was considerable activity scheduled for March 19, 1968, namely, a mass march on the part of strikers and strike sympathizers to the Memphis City Hall to attend the weekly meeting of the Memphis City Council which begins at 2:30 p.m.

Lt. Arkin stated that the strikers who have daily meetings at the Firestone union hall plan to arrive early in order to obtain some of the 407 spectator seats in the City Council chambers, and another group of sympathizers will march from Clayborn AME Temple, 280 Hernando, to the City Hall single file on the sidewalks.

Lt. Arkin stated that King and his group stayed at the Lorraine Motel, 406 Mulberry Street, a predominantly Negro motel, during the night of March 18, 1968, and shortly before noon, King left, ostensibly to go to the state of Mississippi in connection with his "Poor People's Camp-in." Arkin stated that Ralph D. Abernathy remained in Memphis and was conferring with some of the ministerial leaders who are supporting the strike, namely, James Morris Lawson Jr., Dr. H. Ralph Jackson, and others.

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

A Communist party functionary described Martin Luther King Jr. as a confirmed Marxist in February 1962. (Memphis Confidential Source 1)

**JAMES BEVEL**

Bevel, in early March 1966, was observed to be present at the offices of the West Side W. E. B. DuBois Club in Chicago (DCA). Discussion took place at this time centering around reaction to a recent notification that the Attorney General of the United States intended to label the DuBois Clubs as a Communist front. Bevel, in conversation, stated that he would have ignored this notification and kept about



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the work in which he was engaged. He felt that if the DuBois Clubs have a real program of help for the people, then the people would answer for the clubs despite any labels applied to them.

Most present agreed that the attack on the DuBois Clubs was a part of the plan by the "establishment" to undermine the civil rights movement. They felt that the recent hearings into Klan activities in this country were only a beginning which would lead to a full scale attack on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the real target. One of those present stated during the course of this discussion that he was not a Communist, and to this Bevel was overheard to reply that every thinking American should be. He stated that Negroes have not begun to read yet, but when they do, they will all be socialists.  
(Memphis Confidential Source 2)

(A characterization of the DCA is attached to the appendix section of this communication.)

On the late afternoon of March 18, 1968, a third source advised that Rev. James Morris Lawson Jr. had just stated that he has requested Father James Groppi, the controversial Catholic priest from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to come to Memphis over the weekend of March 23, 1968, to lead a protest rally supporting the strike.

Source three recalled that Groppi is the one who has led militant marches in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for the greater part of the last year, aimed at ending closed housing operations in Milwaukee and is the one who led a group of militant Negro youths into the office of the Mayor of Milwaukee about seven or eight months ago when the group with Groppi defaced furniture and equipment in the Mayor's office doing several thousand dollars' worth of damage. Source three pointed out that Groppi is a demagogue who has an ability to inflame audiences, particularly young audiences.

Source three stated that Lawson was not certain that Groppi would come but was hoping he would accede to Lawson's request.

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REV. JAMES MORRIS LAWSON JR.

On May 9, 1967, source four advised that on a WHBQ-TV panel discussion on Sunday, April 30, 1967, Rev. James Morris Lawson Jr., Negro male, pastor of the Centenary Methodist Church, Memphis, and who had been a leader in the April 1967 demonstrations in Memphis opposing United States policy in Vietnam, was asked by Panelist Clark Porteous, "Press-Scimitar" reporter, if he, Lawson, was a Communist. Lawson replied that he was not a member of the Communist Party, but he felt that the Communist program had many good points and much to offer the United States.

Source three advised that Rev. James Morris Lawson was one of the original founders of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960 and has since that time been considered as a leader in so-called nonviolent tactics and source recalled that constantly during April, May, June and July 1967, Lawson regularly participated as a leader in demonstrations in Memphis opposing United States policy in Vietnam.

As recently as February 23, 1968, source three advised that Lawson was preparing to make a trip to Czechoslovakia.

On the same date, source five advised that Lawson had stated on that date that he planned to leave the United States at New York, New York, March 28, 1968, to go to Belgium, Germany and Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he could be a delegate to a Christian Peace Conference. The date of the Conference is not known but was presumed by source to be probably in late March or early April 1968.

On March 8, 1968, source four advised that during the television program, "Press Conference," on Sunday, March 3, 1968, at 12:30 p.m., on WHBQ-TV Channel 13 in Memphis, Tennessee, Rev. James Morris Lawson Jr. was



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interviewed by a news panel consisting of Jim Evans, UPI Bureau Chief, Memphis, by Clark Porteous, veteran reporter for the Memphis "Press-Scimitar" newspaper; and by Don Stevens, News Director, WHBQ-TV. In response to a question by Clark Porteous regarding the Memphis sanitation strike which began February 12, 1968, Lawson said he was a leader in support of the strike which is being supported by the Memphis Ministerial Alliance. Porteous asked Lawson if his group planned to bring any "black power" boys into the strike activity. Lawson said the group was bringing in the "black power" boys as the group wanted a "united front."

In response to a question by Stevens and Porteous regarding the importing of outsiders, Lawson replied that he definitely wanted to bring in such people as Martin Luther King Jr., of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). When asked about Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) being brought in, Lawson replied that he had known Carmichael for eight years and felt that Carmichael was doing much to unify Negroes all over the eastern seaboard; and that if it was necessary to insure a unified Negro effort in Memphis he, Lawson, would bring Carmichael to Memphis. Lawson blamed the "bad judgment and actions of the Memphis Police Department" for all the trouble thus far in connection with the sanitation workers strike which started February 12, 1968.

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On March 19, 1968, source six advised that on the late evening of March 18, 1968, [redacted] Rev. Ezekiel Bell, Negro male, Pastor, Parkway Gardens Presbyterian Church, [redacted] will insist that the ministers making up the governing body of COME invite former national chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Stokely Carmichael to come to Memphis within the next ten days to lead a strike rally and if these ministers veto his recommendation, he and his church individually will bring Carmichael to Memphis within the next ten days. Bell further emphasized that he wants to bring a barrage of outside figures to Memphis in order to create the utmost turmoil and to bring the city of Memphis to "its feet."

Source six recalled that Bell has been one of the most vocal and vituperative and demagogic strike support leaders and that within the past month in the City Council chambers he urged others to forcibly tear down the city seal and at another City Council meeting held about two weeks ago he made the statement in public that if he thought the city of Memphis was worth burning he would burn it himself.

On March 19, 1968, source six stated that Jesse Epps, Field Director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which is attempting to organize the sanitation workers, plans to saturate the Negro community with handbills urging that all Negroes leave school and their jobs March 22, 1968, for a massive downtown protest march; that Rev. Ezekiel Bell stated that the march would start at 9:00 a.m.; and that the COME is asking for 400 to 500 volunteers to appear around 6:30 a.m. March 22, 1968, at the Sanitation Department storage area at Democrat Road and Airways Boulevard to physically prevent sanitation trucks from starting their daily rounds with the realization that there will be several hundred mass arrests of these demonstrators by the Memphis Police Department.

On March 19, 1968, Lt. Arkin advised that a reliable source of the Memphis Police Department stated that at a recent strike support meeting Rev. Bell, in front of several hundred strike sympathizers stated that he had quit smoking three years ago but had resumed smoking recently in order that he would have an excuse to carry matches. Bell did not elaborate but the police source assumed that he was indicating people might burn



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as a protest; in other words, set sporadic fires as a harassment in the form of vandalism in the city of Memphis.

Lt. Arkin stated that his department had learned that Ezekiel Bell, who was born August 9, 1935, of parents Dan and Evelyn Bell, as of 1950 resided at 1632 Brookins, Memphis, Tennessee, and had attended the Douglas School from the third grade until his graduation there on June 5, 1953. He was first in a class of 42 students, was President of the Student Council, and President of the Senior Class.

The above information as received from Memphis sources was furnished to Lieutenant E. H. Arkin and Mr. William Bray, 111th Military Intelligence Group, Memphis, Tennessee.



APPENDIX

W. E. B. DU BOIS CLUBS OF AMERICA (DCA)

A source advised that on October 26-27, 1963, a conference of members of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA), including national functionaries, met in Chicago, Illinois, for the purpose of setting in motion forces for the establishment of a new national Marxist-oriented youth organization which would hunt for the most peaceful transition to socialism. The delegates were told that it would be reasonable to assume that the young socialists attracted into this new organization would eventually pass into the CP itself.

A second source has advised that the founding convention for the new youth organization was held from June 19-21, 1964, at 150 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California, at which time the name W. E. B. DuBois Clubs of America (DCA) was adopted. Approximately 500 delegates from throughout the United States attended this convention.

The second source advised in September, 1966, that Mike Zagarelli, CPUSA Youth Director, stated that in Negro communities the Party still supported the plan to build "left" socialist centers and to solidify the Party base through the DCA. This source also advised in September, 1966, that Daniel Rubin, CPUSA National Organizational Secretary, stated the Party believes the DCA should have a working-class outlook and be a mass organization favorable to socialism, socialist countries and Marxism, and in April, 1967, advised that Gus Hall, CPUSA General Secretary, indicated the DCA primary emphasis should be on developing mass resistance to the draft.

A third source advised in September, 1967, that Jarvis Tyner was elected chairman of the DCA on September 10, 1967, at the Third National Convention of the DCA held in New York, New York, from September 8-10, 1967.

A fourth source advised during August, 1967, that Jarvis Tyner is a member of the National Committee of the CPUSA.

A fifth source advised on September 21, 1967, that the headquarters of the DCA is located at 34 West 17th Street, New York, New York.

APPENDIX

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Reference: Memorandum dated and captioned  
as above prepared at Memphis,  
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