

In the midst of organizing his Poor People's Campaign, Dr. King was reluctant to travel to Memphis when first approached by Lawson in late February. Rev. Andrew Young, in 1968 the executive vice-president of SCLC, told the committee that the SCLC staff initially opposed a King trip to Memphis. Dr. King eventually agreed, however, to make an initial trip in an attempt to discourage further violence, rearranging his schedule and flying to Memphis on March 18, 1968. He saw the poorly paid, badly organized, mostly Black garbage workers as epitomizing the problems of the poor in the United States.

On the evening of March 18, Dr. King gave a well-received address to a throng of 17,000 strikers and their supporters. Encouraged by his reception, he announced he would head a citywide demonstration and sympathy strike of other workers on Friday, March 22. As the result of a recordbreaking snowstorm, the march was rescheduled for Thursday, March 28. In the meantime, efforts to settle the strike failed as Mayor Loeb tenaciously continued to reject union demands.

At about 11 a.m. on March 28, 2 hours after the march had originally been scheduled to begin, Dr. King arrived at the Clayborn Temple in Memphis to lead the demonstrators. By this time, the impatient and tense crowd of about 6,000 persons had heard rumors that police had used clubs and mace to prevent a group of high school students from joining the demonstration.

The march, led by Dr. King and Reverend Abernathy, began shortly after 11. As it proceeded along Beale Street toward Main, several Black youths broke store windows with signpost clubs. Police, clad in gas masks and riot gear, blocked Main Street. Abernathy and Dr. King were somewhere in the middle of the procession, not at its head, when they heard the shattering of glass. Some teenagers at the rear of the march began breaking windows and looting stores. When violence appeared imminent, Dr. King asked Reverend Lawson to cancel the march. SCLC aides commandeered a private automobile, and Dr. King was hustled away to safety at the Holiday Inn-Rivermont Hotel.

As Lawson pleaded with the marchers to return to Clayborn Temple, police moved toward Main and Beale where youths met them with picket signs and rocks. Tear gas was fired into the mob of young Blacks and stragglers who were unable to make their way back to the starting point. Police dispersed the crowd with nightsticks, mace and finally guns. In the ensuing melee, 60 persons were injured, and Larry Payne, a 16 year-old Black youth, was killed by police gunfire. Much of the violence was attributed to the Invaders, a group of young Black militants. A curfew was ordered following the riot, and Tennessee Gov. Buford Ellington called out 3,500 National Guard troops.

Dr. King was upset and deeply depressed by the bloody march. Never before had demonstrators led by Dr. King perpetrated violence, according to Abernathy. The press excoriated Dr. King for inciting the tragic confrontation, even though he was quick to state that his staff had not planned the march and it had been poorly monitored. The Memphis debacle was labeled a failure of nonviolence direct action.

Three members of the militant Invaders visited Dr. King on the morning following the violence, Friday, March 29. They acknowledged their role in inciting the disturbance but explained that they merely wanted a meaningful role in the strike. Dr. King said he would do what he could, but stated emphatically that he could not support a group that condoned violence. At a press conference later that morn-

ing, he announced that he would return to Memphis the following week to demonstrate that he was nonviolent. Abernathy then left Memphis for Jackson and Andrew Young, in 1968, told the committee that Dr. King could not have returned to Memphis if he had been nonviolent. Following the Memphis march, other civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Dr. King could control the Poor People's Campaign.

On Saturday, March 30, 1968, SCLC executive staff, including Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, Bevel, Walter Fauntroy, and others, met to resolve the Memphis demonstration with the Poor People's Campaign. Dr. King was "delighted" by this plan for nonviolence. The next day he spoke at the National Cathedral, urging his withdrawal from Vietnam. He promised an orderly, nonviolent demonstration. Dr. King's aide, James Bevel, announced he would lead the march.

On Monday, April 1, 1968, Dr. King arrived in Memphis to lay out his plan for the demonstration in support of the strikers. Unfortunately, the demonstration had been ignored as a focus of national attention. The funeral of riot victim James Earl Ray was held on April 4.

Dr. King, with Abernathy, James Bevel, and Scott Lee, arrived in Memphis on April 4. Their flight had been delayed by an extensive search for a bomb. James Earl Ray, a local mortician, was the chauffeur during his Memphis trip. Dr. King's flight from the airport to the Lorraine Motel in Memphis had received heavy media attention that he would be staying at the Lorraine Motel. A television station announced that he was staying at the Lorraine Motel.

On the morning of April 4, 1968, Dr. King issued a temporary restraining order against the demonstrators' demonstration that was originally scheduled for April 5. Dr. King was determined to maintain nonviolence and the planned protest by union leaders.

Tornado warnings were issued for the Memphis area on the morning of April 4, and heavy rain and high winds, along with clear, pleasant weather, 2,000 persons gathered at the Clayborn Temple Church and awaited Dr. King's arrival there. King had asked Rev. James Bevel when Abernathy saw the news of the Memphis demonstration, he telephoned Dr. King and he agreed to go to Memphis. Dr. King gave stirring speeches of his career.