

DR. KING REBUTS HOOVER CHARGES

Offers to Discuss Criticism of Agents With F.B.I. Chief — Backed by Rights Leaders

By JOHN HERBERS
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ATLANTA, Nov. 19 — The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in a statement today that J. Edgar Hoover "has apparently faltered under the awesome burden, complexities and responsibilities of his office."

Mr. Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said in an interview with a group of women reporters in Washington yesterday that Dr. King was "the most notorious liar in the country" for saying that F.B.I. agents in Albany, Ga. had failed to act on Negroes' civil rights complaints because they were Southerners.

Today Dr. King wired Mr. Hoover that he would make himself available at any time for a discussion of the bureau's work on civil rights cases.

[In Washington, a group of Negro civil rights leaders met with President Johnson and expressed their full agreement with Dr. King's complaints.]

Disagree on Origins

Dr. King's statement and telegram were released here by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, of which he is president. He prepared them at Bimini, in the Bahamas, where he is writing his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, to be awarded in Oslo next month.

In yesterday's interview, Mr. Hoover said that four of the five agents working in the Albany area at the time referred to were from the North, and that when he had attempted to confer with Dr. King on the matter, the Negro leader had ignored his telephone calls.

In the same interview, Mr. Hoover said the Warren Commission "was unfair and unjust" in criticizing the bureau for failure to notify the Secret Service that Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's assassin, was in Dallas.

Dr. King issued this statement regarding Mr. Hoover's charge:

"I cannot conceive of Mr. Hoover making a statement

like this without being under extreme pressure. He has apparently faltered under the awesome burden, complexities and responsibilities of his office. Therefore, I cannot engage in a public debate with him. I have nothing but sympathy for this man who has served his country so well."

Dr. King's telegram to Mr. Hoover said:

"I was appalled and surprised at your reported statement maligning my integrity. What motivated such an irresponsible accusation is a mystery to me.

Questions Effectiveness

"I have sincerely questioned the effectiveness of the F.B.I. in racial incidents, particularly where bombings and brutalities against Negroes are at issue. But I have never attributed this merely to the presence of Southerners in the F.B.I.

"This is part of a broader question of Federal involvement in the protection of Negroes in the South and the seeming inability to gain convictions in even the most heinous crimes perpetuated against civil rights workers.

"It remains a fact that not a single arrest was made in Albany, Ga. during the many brutalities against Negroes. Neither has a single arrest been made in connection with the tragic murder of the four children in Birmingham nor in the case of the three murdered civil rights workers in Mississippi.

"Moreover, all F.B.I. agents inevitably work with local law enforcement officers in car thefts, bank robberies and other interstate violations. This makes it more difficult to function effectively in cases where the rights and safety of Negro citizens are being threatened by these same [local] law enforcement officers.

"I will be happy to discuss this question with you at length in the near future. Although your statement said you have attempted to meet with me, I have sought in vain for any record of such a request.

"I have always made myself available to all F.B.I. agents of the Atlanta office and encouraged our staff and affiliates to cooperate with them in spite of the fact that many of our people have suspicions and distrust of the F.B.I. as a result of the slow pace of justice in the South."

Number of Arrests

Several arrests have been made recently in racial crimes in Mississippi on information gathered by the F.B.I.

Two white men were arrested on charges of murdering two Negroes in Meadville, Miss. last May and about 20 whites have been arrested in connection with bombings, church burnings and beating of civil rights workers in the McComb and Natchez areas.

A Federal grand jury has indicted law enforcement authorities of Philadelphia, Miss., for alleged beatings of Negro prisoners.

In the interview, Mr. Hoover also was critical of "red neck sheriffs" and other authorities in Mississippi reported to have participated in racial crimes.

Most civil rights leaders in the South have been critical of the F.B.I. for not providing more protection from racial violence. The bureau maintains it is an investigative agency only and tries to work where possible with local authorities.

In Albany, where Dr. King conducted a campaign against segregation in 1962, civil rights groups charged there had been a "complete breakdown of law enforcement" and asked the F.B.I. to intervene. James E. McMahon, then agent in charge of the bureau's Atlanta office, said there had been no such breakdown.

Leslie W. Dunbar, executive director of the Southern Regional Council, said it was difficult for the agents to "act contrary to the interests of the local law people."

"It is not altogether accurate to single out the F.B.I. for criticism," he said. "The F.B.I. works for the Department of Justice. In civil rights situations it's pretty much restricted to carrying out the assignments which it receives from the Department."

In Albany, Mr. Dunbar said, "the record of the whole Justice Department was poor. Just as the Kennedy Administration had its Bay of Pigs, it also had Albany, where it did everything wrong."

Mrs. Ruby Hurley, southeastern regional director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said she had found agents in charge of the major F.B.I. offices "very cooperative" in investigating civil rights cases.

"The difficulty is with the agents who go out to investigate," she said. "They tend to take on the coloration of the community."

Mrs. Hurley said in many instances the agents talked with the white people but "never talk with the Negroes—the people who are being oppressed."

"In some other instances," she said, "I have been pleased with the work of the F.B.I."

She said she was "a little appalled at the bluntness" of Mr. Hoover's statement.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee referred to the F.B.I.'s "historic failure to make concrete advances in assuring that Southern Negroes can exercise the simplest rights that most Americans take for granted."

Julian Bond, who heads the committee's communication staff, released a statement saying:

"Let Director Hoover prove that King is a liar by having his agents personally escort to the courthouse any Mississippi Negro who wants to register to vote but who knows any policeman or any white man may beat and jail him while the F.B.I. stands by taking notes."

Dr. King Gives Views

BIMINI, the Bahamas, Nov. 19 (AP)—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said today the Federal Bureau of Investigation under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover was "following the path of appeasement of political

powers in the South."

The Negro integration leader said in an interview:

"If this continues, the reign of terror in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia will increase rather than subside."

Dr. King, referring to Mr. Hoover's attack on him yesterday, said he was certain the F.B.I. chief "would not have made such a vicious accusation without being under extreme pressure."

"This pressure," he continued, "has come on the racial front and from the Warren Report, raising serious questions about the effectiveness of the F.B.I."

Mr. Hoover, in his news conference yesterday, said Dr. King had advised Negroes not to report civil rights violations to the F.B.I. office in Albany, Ga., because the staff members were Southerners.

Denies Accusation

"I never advised Negroes in Albany not to report to the F.B.I.," Dr. King said today. "On the contrary, we reported every incident. But we were dismayed by the fact that nothing was ever done."

"The fact that no arrests have been made in the brutalities at Albany, the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi and the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Ala., has left us all discouraged.

"This has encouraged individuals on the lunatic fringe to feel that they are aided and abetted by Federal agents."

Dr. King said he had never made a blanket criticism of the F.B.I. and its agents. He said he believed a Southerner dedicated to his job could be as effective as one from the North.

"Rather than criticize the F.B.I.," Dr. King said, "I have acted as a mediator, urging Negroes to keep faith with the F.B.I. and to not lose hope."

"But you can't explain to a Negro why a plane can be bombed and its pieces scattered for miles and the crime can be solved, but they can't find out who bombed a church."