Again, I must say that I am sorry that this situation developed, and above all, I am sorry that we were misrepresented in the article. I am sure that it will cause my associates and me some embarrassment and lay upon us the burden of some unnecessary explaining; and I am sure it will make it much more difficult for us to raise funds for our humble and struggling efforts. But in spite of that we will continue to move on. And let me assure you that this in no way lessens my regards for you and Johnson Publication, for I have been so inspired by the good that has come to the Negro and the nation as a result of the creative contribution made by Johnson Publication—nothing less than a tour de force—that I would be an ingrate to fail to appreciate it.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr., President
The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Inc.

MLK:mlb

TLc. MLKP-MBU: Box 20.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Recommendations to SCLC Committee on Future Program

27 October 1959

King offers several proposals to offset criticisms that SCLC’s voter registration efforts had faltered. He recommends publicizing the group’s recent achievements and hiring Bayard Rustin “with the understanding that if any undue criticism” arose “that would prove embarrassing to him or the organization, he would quietly resign.”

1. In order to counteract some false ideas that have been disseminated concerning the program of SCLC, a press release shall be immediately prepared by the Executive Director stating in positive terms the plans and future program of the Conference. It should be made palpably clear that instead of halting its activities the Conference is actually expanding its activities. Something should also be said concerning things that have already been accomplished by the Conference. This release should reach the press before Friday of this week in order to get good coverage.¹

2. Immediately prepare a newsletter to be mailed to at least five thousand persons. The mailing list would be secured from minutes of church groups,

¹ In a statement released to the press on 10 November, SCLC announced plans for “a stepped up action program” to include expanded efforts in “voter-registration, leadership training and nonviolent resistance to segregation.” The release indicated that registration efforts in northern Louisiana and Birmingham would continue (SCLC, Press release, 2 November 1959).
Thus covering a large number of ministers, the MIA files, select group from In Friendship, and persons who wrote to the President during his illness. This newsletter should clearly express the aims and purposes of the Conference, its past accomplishments and future proposals. The section in the last letter dealing with the history of the organization and the names of officers and board members should be repeated since it only reached five or six hundred people. An appeal should be made at the end of the letter for financial aid to carry on the work of the organization.

3. In order to attempt once more to coordinate the activities of the NAACP and the SCLC in the vote drive, and clear up what appears to be seeds of dissention being sown by persons in the top echelon in the NAACP, the President, accompanied by one person from the official family of SCLC, should immediately have a Conference with Roy Wilkins and other NAACP staff members whose presence Mr. Wilkins may deem necessary.

4. Select some few cities where intensified voting drives can be conducted without any resistance from state or local authorities. Immediately seek to set dates when the SCLC can assist in setting up such drives. Since we are a service agency we would naturally seek to work through and coordinate the activities of already existing groups.

5. In order to seriously think through the total freedom struggle, and the role that we should continually play, a two-day retreat should be held during the Christmas holidays. This retreat should consist of about ten persons, and a place should be secured that would be conducive to deep thinking and serious discussion.

6. While the voting drive still holds a significant place in our total program, we must not neglect other important areas. Therefore, I recommend that we begin thinking of some of the other areas that should gain our immediate attention.

7. In order to give Miss Baker an opportunity to set up voting drives in various cities and implement the larger program of SCLC, I recommend that we seek to secure by December 1, the services of the person in public relations whom we voted to employ in our Columbia meeting. This person would assist in carrying out the day to day details of the office and start the all-important job of presenting our organization more adequately to the public. After prayerful and serious consideration, I would like to recommend Bayard Rustin to this position. I make this recommendation not unmindful of the possible perils involved. But I feel that Mr. Rustin's unique organizational ability, his technical competence, and his distinctive ability to stick with a job until it is thoroughly completed, justifies our willingness

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2. King received thousands of letters from well-wishers in the wake of his September 1958 stabbing. In 1956, Rustin, Levison, and Baker formed In Friendship to provide support for the Montgomery bus boycott and other southern desegregation struggles.

3. The inaugural issue of SCLC's The Crusader had appeared in February 1959, but the next issue was not published until May 1961.

4. King met with Wilkins on 30 November in New York City (King to Wilkins, 18 November 1959).
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and SOUTHERN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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Flyer by the Federation of Negro Civil Service Organizations announcing New York City rally 29 October 1959 on the right to vote and the fight to vote. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society.
to take the risk. We may employ him for a period on a trial basis, with the understanding that if any undue criticism that would prove embarrassing to him or the organization, he would quietly resign.\(^5\)

TD. MLKP-MBU: Box 47A.

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5. In a 1 November letter, Stanley Levison wrote Rustin attempting to persuade him to return from Africa, where he was working with the Sahara Project, a campaign to protest French nuclear testing in North Africa. According to Levison, over the protests of Ella Baker, the SCLC ministers backed King’s proposal to hire Rustin, despite his earlier arrest for homosexual activity and his involvement with the Communist Party in the 1930s: “The person who played the role of firmly and unyieldingly opposing you was our buddy, Ella. She used the fears as well as the argument that the organization didn’t need someone like you, but a field secretary.” A few weeks later King asked Levison when Rustin might be expected to return to the United States: “Please let me hear from you as soon as Bayard gets back in the country. We are in desperate need of his services” (King to Levison, 19 November 1959). Rustin went to work with SCLC in early 1960 but was forced to resign in June 1960 due to claims that he unduly influenced King (see King to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., 24 June 1960, pp. 480–481 in this volume).