known very few quiet days in the last few years. I have been arrested five times and put in Alabama jails. My home has been bombed twice. A day seldom passes that my family and I are not the recipients of threats of death. I have been the victim of a near fatal stabbing. So in a real sense I have been battered by the storms of persecution. I must admit that at times I have felt that I could no longer bear such a heavy burden, and have been tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life. But every time such a temptation appeared, something came to strengthen and sustain my determination. I have learned now that the Master's burden is light precisely when we take his yoke upon us.\(^3\)

My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly yet proudly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."\(^4\) The suffering and agonizing moments through which I have passed over the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God.


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3. Cf. Matthew 11:30: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
Dear Dr. Martin Luther King

Southern Christian Leadership Conference
407 Auburn Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Martin:

We were puzzled and greatly distressed at the criticism of the NAACP voiced by the Rev. James Lawson at the Raleigh meeting April 16–17 called by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

This has caused considerable discussion among our members. In one way or another they have stated that since they understood that the NAACP had cooperated with the SCLC how did the Lawson blast come about, and how was it that Lawson claimed his views were shared by other leaders in the SCLC?

This last brings you into the matter, of course. Miss Baker evidently thought the situation serious enough to volunteer to newspapermen that Mr. Lawson was voicing a personal opinion.

I know that you join me in the determination not to have a break between our

been a failure to implement legal changes and custom remains unchanged. Unless we are prepared to create the climate . . . the law can never bring victory” (SNCC, “Report on the Raleigh conference,” 25 June 1960). Lawson’s address was later reprinted as “We Are Trying to Raise the ‘Moral Issue,’” in Broderick and Meier, eds., Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century, pp. 274–281. King had been asked to comment on Lawson’s statement during an appearance on “Meet the Press” (see Interview on “Meet the Press,” 17 April 1960, p. 434 in this volume).

2. King penned Lawson’s name and telephone number on the top of this letter. King and Wilkins met in Atlanta on 7 May (Wilkins to Mays, 19 May 1960). Two days later, Lawson sent Wilkins a typescript of his address and insisted that it was not “an attack on the NAACP at all” but was intended “to indicate how the sit-in movement is a critique of all efforts to bring creative social change” (Wilkins to Lawson, 9 May 1960). In Wilkins’s response to Lawson, which he also forwarded to King, he rejected Lawson’s explanation and stated that the NAACP’s work “made the happenings of the past few months possible” and concluded that “the tone, wording and course of your Raleigh speech are cause for as much disappointment as irritation” (Wilkins to King and Wilkins to Lawson, both dated 13 May 1960).

3. After receiving reports of Lawson’s address, Wilkins invited several NAACP officials to provide reactions to the speech, noting that “the criticisms of the NAACP which emanated from this conference and which have not thus far been repudiated by Rev. Martin Luther King would seem to pose a situation to which I think we should give careful consideration” (Wilkins, Memo to Gloster Current et al., 18 April 1960). In a 20 April reply, John M. Brooks, director of the NAACP voter registration committee, commented: “Rev. Lawson’s alleged statements certainly reflect the attitude of some of the Southern Christian leadership groups in the south, in spite of the fact that the whole movement is using the foundation built by the NAACP” (see also Henry Lee Moon to Wilkins, 18 April 1960).

4. According to the Greensboro Daily News, Ella Baker told a reporter that “there is no fight between the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference” and acknowledged that “there is naturally a difference in emphasis.” She also reportedly explained that the “comment reflected Lawson’s opinion and ‘certainly does not represent a policy opinion’ of the student group” (“Negroes Organize Coordinating Body,” Greensboro Daily News, 18 April 1960).
groups. We seek the same goals and we have the same enemies. Those enemies would be happier than they have been for forty years if a split should develop.

At the same time we feel aggrieved over this unwarranted attack. The SCLC did not initiate the sit-downs. That we know. CORE did not initiate them. That we know. The NAACP did not initiate the wave that began February 1, but the NAACP staged the only successful sit-down at lunch counters in Oklahoma City and in Wichita, Kansas, in 1958. That we do know.

But in the present case we did what SCLC and CORE did. We rushed in to help the youngsters. Upon what basis does Mr. Lawson speak so bitterly? If the NAACP had condemned the sit-down tactic and had refused to permit its youth units to participate or if the NAACP had remained outside, we could understand Mr. Lawson.

The Memphis NAACP Branch alone put up $3,400 in bail; the whole Orangeburg operation was an NAACP operation with bail money being furnished by us; we arranged for bail of the last students in Baton Rouge; it was the NAACP legal defense fund which called the lawyers conference in Washington and coordinated the complicated and varied strategy of defense; it was the NAACP youth group in San Antonio who won the battle without firing a shot, just by announcing their intention to sit down. I am hopeful that you can help clarify the situation. I know you will want to.

There are some other disturbing elements in the picture which I would not care to go into here, but which I feel you and I should discuss privately as soon as possible.

Very sincerely yours,

[signed] Roy
Roy Wilkins,
Executive Secretary

RW/emb

THLS. MLKJP-GAMK: Box 17.

5. Lawson conducted nonviolent workshops with members of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council before their 1958 protest. For more on the Oklahoma sit-ins, see Barbara Ann Posey, "Why I Sit In," September 1960.

6. The lawyers' conference was held 18–20 March at Howard University (Richard L. Lyons, "Dime Store Food Service Held a 'Right,'" Washington Post, 20 March 1960).