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Joan Beifuss: Today is July 30th. We are in the office of Reverend Billy Kyles at Monumental Baptist Church. The interviewers are Joan Beifuss and Bill Thomas.

Bill Thomas: Well, I see since you've been through this once...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Uh huh. We've started at the, moved up, we started (muffled).

Joan Beifuss: We're back to the beginning I think.

Bill Thomas: Yeah, if we could drop back a little now, and I think we covered pretty well your background coming to Memphis, and then a little bit on the 3rd, and quite a lot on the 4th of April, but if we could move back a little bit, and then I'll get the rest of the chronology. Such as, I assume a good place to begin would be when did you hear about the strike? Or, how did you hear about it, and...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I had been to Birmingham the Sunday before the strike started, and my wife and I were driving back. We drove down, took sort of a little, made a little holiday out of it. I was guest speaker at a church in Birmingham, and we were driving back. We were in Mississippi, and we got close enough to Memphis to pick it up, and then we heard the news that the sanitation, garbage men, walked off the job. And I said, rather unexcitedly, I said, "Hmm." I said, "Hey, we've got a garbage strike in Memphis." I think it was almost on the heels of the New York strike. I said, "Hey, we've got a garbage strike in Memphis." She said, "Yeah." My first thought was it wouldn't last very long, a week, not more than that.

Bill Thomas: Had you heard of any, had any indication, heard of any problems in the garbage department prior to that? Was this a surprise?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Not really, because I had heard -- well, two or three years ago, they tried, about 3 years ago they tried to organize a union, and well more than that, about 4 years ago, maybe longer than that. And, many of the men were fired, and I think one of the former city commissioners lost the mayor's race. Well, he lost for a number of reasons, but one of the reasons I think he lost was because he fired so many of the, he was the department head.

Bill Thomas: This would be Bill Farris.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, and a lot of the men were let go. And, of course, Ingram took this as; I mean this was part of his whole theme during the mayor's race when he beat Farris, that Farris was not for the little man. And, this has always been one of the very sensitive areas in the Negro community. A group of ministers, I was one of the ministers who went down to Farris, to plead with him about putting these men back on, and he gave us some sob story about they weren't fired because they were trying to

organize a union, they were fired because they were lazy. These men had been on eight years or longer, and longer than that.

Bill Thomas: Reverend Kyles, do you remember at that time what some of the issues were why?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think, sort of like the same thing. Not working, not being paid when it rained; you know, having to leave. The pay was, itself, too low. Not having an adequate place to change or shower or this sort of thing, and that the foremen were just so dogged toward the men. Those were the things that stuck in my mind about them.

Joan Beifuss: Do you recall what other ministers went with you to Farris's office?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was a group of ministers from the Baptist Pastor's Conference, and I think it was -- gee; it has been so long ago I don't remember, but I was on the committee.

Joan Beifuss: It was not a crossing community lines group of ministers?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, it was a black group, Baptist.

Joan Beifuss: And you were all Baptist, yes?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: All Baptist, and they went to plead for the jobs.

Bill Thomas: So, actually the ministers had supported, to an extent, the garbage sanitation men before.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes, long before, of course.

Bill Thomas: I didn't know that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, because as I said, these were the folk that we could so easily identify with I guess. You know, they all, they were the persons that really made up our deacons board and this sort of thing, our ushers board. They were, it was not hard to identify with them.

Bill Thomas: Okay, so then, you knew there were some conditions that exist, and the strike had happened.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The pay was terribly low. I mean, this was always an issue. That men have to work so hard for so little, and they were just treated so bad, at that time. They tried to organize a union, and they were kicked out. And, I think they tried to organize another time while Ingram was mayor, and that is when they were going to injunction them. It surprised me that Negroes forgot this, that good Judge Ingram was

such a friend to Negroes, but it was under his administration that -- of course he could always get out of it by saying, well with that form of government, that wasn't his department. He still was the mayor, but I lay as much blame there. And, he was always a champion of little people. It seems to me that in the mayor's seat that he could have been more effective in getting some of the grievances of the sanitation workers, you know, redressed, because he was the mayor, but it never happened. When they tried to organize under his administration, they were thrown under the injunction and they just stayed there. I still believe that, even though I was out of town that it was a spontaneous thing, because if the union it seems to me would have planned a strike, they would have planned it ...

Bill Thomas: In the summer time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In the summer, yeah. They wouldn't have picked.

Bill Thomas: (Muffled) been into that area really close, and it, that must be right, and it is such an amazing thing that suddenly -- suddenly, you know, 1300 just decided they had had enough.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It is the same sort of thing that you have with the Rosa Parks thing, you know what I am saying. Negroes have been doing this for 100 years, why now? But she had been going on that bus since she was a little girl. It was just that time, room there. And so, I wasn't so surprised. The only surprise I probably had was that they all went off, that they -- we finally got that many to go. But I knew that they were not satisfied because I made many of the meetings. The union, they were using union halls. When T.O. Jones was fired, he went out and started working for the union. I would go by and speak to him, and I always enjoyed going by, because they were always such a lively group. Oh hey, anything you say, they'd just, they'd really go. So, after we got back from Birmingham I stayed here 2 weeks, and I went to -- of course I went on and, you know, to the meetings and started going. At first I was not permitted to speak at the meetings.

Bill Thomas: Why was that?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The unions were overly conscious of not making a racial issue out of it.

Bill Thomas: I see.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And I was so closely identified with NAACP that I serve as Labor Industry Chairman of NAACP. So, I mean, and Thomas Jones has worked with me. I started going out to the Firestone, I guess I went the next day when I got back, and I started going to the (muffled) meetings. Well, the NAACP met that Tuesday, and decided what action they would take to support the workers, and so they drew up. Well, this was maybe a couple of weeks after I got back from Birmingham. Anyway, they drew up plans for strategy on how to support the sanitation workers. The first meeting I

went to I was supposed to read the resolution. I read to the newspapers and all this. And, Thomas Jones himself told Lucy, reminded Bill Lucy, one of the union officials, that no resolutions or anything could be read without the approval of the executive board or something, and that was pressure I feel on Thomas Jones from local union people, because Memphis has this thing about unions, not to make it a racial thing if you're going to get local union support.

Bill Thomas: However, at that point did you feel it was a racial thing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh, of course I did. And, so I didn't read the resolution. I simply just made remarks. And, I told them it didn't make any difference whether I read it or not, because I was going to support them, and my interest was in the men, not the union, and that was the matter to it straight through. If the men had not wanted the union, they could have -- at any point they would have wanted to go in without the union, it would have been all right with me because I don't have any feeling. I mean I don't have any faith in unions. I mean, I just don't, that's personal, but I was fighting because I thought this was what the men wanted, and I wanted them to have what they wanted. So, I started going to the meetings, and at this point there was no (muffled) organization. I was representing the NAACP, and ministers. I wear about 8 or 10 different hats. We started having mass meetings and the like, and demonstrations. I would march every day with the men and all this. So, the final plan or strategy, in the final plan NAACP had come up with was, out of the items -- we had a copy, I tried to find it. I got the letter from, I tried to find the first resolution that I read, but I couldn't find it, but it had to do with first an all night vigil around city hall on Friday or a Tuesday or Monday, I am not sure. Anyway, Maxine Smith and myself held a press conference for NAACP stating what the NAACP would do to support the sanitation strike. This was the sanitation workers. This was without their permission or anything else. We didn't ask them. We said, whether you want our help or not, you've got it.

Bill Thomas: Do you remember now, about when was this? Would that have been before the ...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was before the macing and everything else.

Bill Thomas: Okay. The strike was February 12th, which was a Monday. The macing was on a Friday.

Joan Beifuss: The 23rd.

Bill Thomas: Which was February the 17th.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: All right, the press conference was held that Tuesday, about Tuesday. Wait a minute, it could have been Thursday. Yeah, before the macing because I held the conference, I mean I read the resolution on television and handled the press conference.

Bill Thomas: Thursday was the day of the long meeting, the picnic.

Joan Beifuss: The Fred Davis thing.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I was out of town. Here's what happened. I made the press conference to have the all-night vigil, and the other things that we had decided to do, and I had to go to Miami on the 19th of February. So, I must have read that thing on about the 14th or 15th.

Joan Beifuss: Oh right, so just a day or so after it started.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Now the NAACP board meeting was February 13th, so we held the conference the Thursday, and the vigil was supposed to be that Monday. All right, I had to leave. No, the vigil was that Tuesday. I had to leave Monday the 19th for a minister's leadership training program in Miami, Florida, sponsored by SCLC. So, I spent that next week in Miami. Now, it was that Thursday they had the Fred Davis meeting. I was in Miami.

Bill Thomas: You were in Miami, and you heard about...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were keeping abreast by telephone and radio about the strike.

Bill Thomas: And you heard about the macing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We heard about the macing that Friday. We finished our conference that Friday, and I had said jokingly to Dr. King, I said, man we have a sanitation garbage strike in Memphis, and we might have to get you to come and help us out, you know. I said that in Miami about Thursday or Friday.

Bill Thomas: Now this was (muffled) open when...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It opened the 19th. It was a conference dealing with crises in the cities.

Bill Thomas: During the summer, coming.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were trying to heat off a hot summer. SCLC had a Ford Foundation Grant. We got 10 or more ministers from every city that has a population of 100,000 Negroes, and we gathered in Miami at the Four Ambassadors Hotel, and we had an intensive week's workshop that was just tremendous. We concluded that Friday with a speech by Dr. King, and it was also noted that two nights while he was there, he could not come out. The Miami police would not let him out of his hotel room because of threats, and he could not attend two of the sessions.

Bill Thomas: And the concluding session then was the day of the macing here.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That's right. The concluding session was the day of the macing here, and he had to go to Carnegie Hall for that night. So, he spoke to us about 3.

Bill Thomas: Do you remember what his topic was?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, I've got the speech somewhere. Yeah, I can give you a copy of it.

Bill Thomas: (Muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And, he talked to us, and he gave us the speech, and left out and I had some beautiful pictures there, all out of focus. I took pictures of the whole conference, and they were.

Bill Thomas: All out of focus?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, terrible, 35 mm. I dropped it or something, and the focus was damaged, and I didn't know it. So, my wife and I, our wedding anniversary is March the 19th. This is a photo of the ministers, some of the ministers in attendance. We took, that was made in Miami.

Joan Beifuss: Who was there from Memphis, besides yourself?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Reverend Bill Smith at (muffled) Chapel Church, Reverend John Mickle at Congregational Church, Reverend T.C. Lightfoot at (muffled) Chapel Community Church, and Judge Ben Hooks. We were the Memphis group. So, we had planned to stay in Miami, or go over to Freeport, or the Bahamas or some place. That was our honeymoon period. We had planned to go to Miami before the conference, we were going to Miami on March 7, which is our wedding anniversary. So, since the conference was the 19th, we decided to go on to, I decided to take her with me to the conference, and then we would stay, you know, an extra couple of weeks on our anniversary. But the Friday we finished the conference, we had a beautiful conference, we gathered in the hotel, we wanted some kind of demonstration, and everybody was trying to think of what kind of demonstration they wanted to have in Miami before we leave, and nobody came up with anything. I said I've got a good idea. There is a girl who was there who was a minister's wife. I used to sing, well I used to some in Chicago with a group, and she used to have a group in Chicago. I said, "Etta, do you still play the piano?" They had this big baby grand in the lobby. This was a big, fabulous hotel. And, she said yes. So I said, "Come on, let's go to the piano and play." She says, "Where, in the lobby?" I said, "Let's go sing." So we went out and about three of us started it off. She was playing, and we were singing. And, before we finished about 50 guys had gathered around the piano and we were, all preachers now, just singing down. We sang for an hour. It was the most, it was just beautiful. People would stop, and they were real nervous, the people were nervous at the hotel, but people came through

and they thought we were a professional group, and asked us could we be booked on the beach. They wanted to book us on the beach. It was a beautiful thing. We sang for about an hour, and then we closed by singing, "We Shall Overcome." The conference was over, and after the conference we got the news, I mean after that singing we got the news that they had been maced in Memphis.

Bill Thomas: Did somebody call, or?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well yes, Judge Hooks' wife called her father to say they were going to the Bahamas. We had planned to go to the Bahamas, and he said, "Oh Lord, all hell's broke out in Memphis. They threw garbage in the street. They broke out windows in Goldsmith's." The report was just completely distorted, and they maced the people on Main Street. And, so right away we get on the phone and we call. I said, oh baby, I said we are going to have to go home. I said, you know, I had got the thing started more or less. The action was taken by NAACP, like the vigil and other demonstrations. I said I can't afford to be away. So, we cut the thing short and we left. We took a plane that Saturday morning and came back. While we were on our way, from the macing to Saturday morning they had met and organized COME. So, by the time we got here, COME was organized. So, we just rolled up our sleeves and went on to work in the COME organization. And, I guess we met night and day for the 13 weeks between meeting and marching and planning strategy and that sort of thing, but that is where we were, when it first started and how we got involved in it.

Bill Thomas: Okay, let me digress just a little bit more (muffled) may take you on the digression, I don't know. Where, Reverend Kyles, did you first meet, Dr. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh, where did I first? I think I first met Martin in Chicago, when he spoke at Orchestra Hall. I was living there then.

Bill Thomas: So this would have been before you came to Memphis, and that was in the '60s.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, It was about '56 or '57 when I met him, '56.

Bill Thomas: And you had much contact before you came to Memphis?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, off and on. We, when I moved to Memphis, while we were in the same convention, he was President of our Congress, Vice President of our National Baptist Convention Congress Department. So, we had association in the Congress.

Joan Beifuss: What is the Congress?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It is the teaching unit of the ...

Bill Thomas: Of the church?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Of our convention, yes. And, he was our Vice President. Well, he had some disagreements with our President, Jace Jackson out of Chicago, and then about ‘61, I guess, Jack took him out of office, and there was a big stink about that.

Joan Beifuss: Is that the Reverend Jackson in Chicago?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yeah, with Joseph Harrington, yes.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, the one that keeps being against military actions.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: So, he was the president of the parent body, and he maneuvered to get Dr. King out of office, but we would see each other. And, I worked with SCLC very close from ‘60. Well, I was a Memphis affiliate, Judge Hooks and myself, and some neighbors, and some other ministers here, and I would attend the board meetings, and conventions, and we would see each other. Whenever he would come to Memphis usually we would be together.

Joan Beifuss: Reverend Kyles, to become a field director, or whatever for SCLC, did King himself pick all his people in different cities, or for instance would Ben Hooks have asked you to start working at SCLC, or?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yes, more or less. Jim Lawson, well Jim wasn’t here at the time but Jim was one of the organizers of SCLC more or less, and in Chicago I was not a member of SCLC as such, but I knew Martin from our ministerial association. And, whenever I would go to Atlanta, you know, I’d see him in Atlanta, and his wife, and we would always try, in that respect, as ministers more so than as (muffled).

Bill Thomas: I guess what I’m really trying to get at is when did the relationship begin between you and Dr. King being close enough to where he would be coming to your house for dinner?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: More or less through the convention than any civil rights, through the Congress, as preachers. We had similar friends, we’d be together after the Congress. We’d be in our room, or his room, or somebody’s room. We’d be out preaching sermons, or we’d be at restaurants talking, or this sort of thing. The relationship was really more as ministers than as civil rights persons.

Joan Beifuss: What kind of preacher was he when he preached in Negro churches?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Tremendous, he didn’t preach any differently I don’t think. Tremendous preacher.

Bill Thomas: What was your impression of Dr. King? Did you have a personal impression of him? What kind of man did you feel he was?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh, um, that's a difficult question. It shouldn't be. I think of all kinds of things, and to say it succinctly, I guess. In my judgment, he's the greatest leader that our people have had and generations really. For this generation I think he was -- I see him as, well as a preacher I always see that God provides history with what it needs for that hour, whether it's King, or whether it's Kennedy, or whether whoever it is. I see him as providing a man, and I see Dr. King as just a great person in the greatest sense. The thing that I always marveled at him about was that he had all this ability and everything else, but sometimes it would take us an hour to go through a hotel lobby, and the poor guy could hardly ever eat if he was in a restaurant. He would stop to shake hands. People would come by, unless we just kept the people away he was never -- I have never seen him tired or disgusted with too many people around him. You know, we'd say, well Dr. King is trying to eat. Oh, hi there, how are you? He'd turn around. His food would get cold, and to have all this personal magnetism. And, never, he was never disgusted with people. It would take us, to walk through a lobby, by the time he talked, stop and have something more than, "Hi, how are you?" to everybody. He had a fantastic way of remembering people from Los Angeles, tell so and so in Los Angeles I said hello, and he had this great warmth for human beings. And, really, I am just so convinced that he was sincere without being a saint. You know I never looked at Martin as a saint. A human, that here he was a hope for us that wasn't wrapped up in something. Now a lot of people did deify him and that sort of thing. I guess we do unconsciously, but I saw him as being so human, and to have all this and yet human. He always portrayed his human traits to us. He joked and laughed, and always had a good joke. He'd tell me, my wife was pregnant once, I think I said on an earlier tape, and he said, "Well, you're not only taking the Lord literally, you're preaching, but you're helping to multiply the earth." He'd always have those kinds of things to say, and it always amazed me that he could take \$100,000 check and sign it over to SCLC. He never really worried about money. You know, he'd be planning a project for SCLC that would cost a half-million dollars, and they were already \$100,000 in the red, and he's planning. You know, go out and raise it. So, I think of him as just a great human being, but the greatest black leader that this century has known, or will know I think.

Bill Thomas: When Dr. King was first invited here, did the irony occur to you at that time, where you had just been in Miami, and joking about this?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It certainly did. It surely did. I mentioned that to several people.

Bill Thomas: Now the night he first came in in March, were you at that meeting?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes, uh huh. He was surprised first of all to see the black community as close together as it was, and to have the old movement spirit. It really lifted him because people had been -- his friends had been on him about that the movement days were over in the sense of big mass rallies and nonviolent movements, and the fact that violence had not occurred in Memphis during the 8 weeks or whatever number of weeks at that point. And, he commented when he came in and saw all those people, you know, he was just fascinated because this was like old times, and how they

were whooping up everything he'd say, hang onto his every word. And that first night we broke every fire ordinance. You just couldn't have gotten 10 more people in there if you had tried. I mean, the place was just, they were down the aisles, and every available space was taken. You know, I sat on the steps, you know in about a little space like that. After the meeting we went to the Lorraine Motel, and some staff people were there to work on the Poor People's Campaign. It was at that meeting, there was a choir passing through from a college somewhere in Texas or some place, and when we got there they were singing for him. They were staying at the Lorraine. They had given a concert some place in Memphis, a negro college choir, and the girls had on pin curls, some of them had pajamas on, house coats, but when they found out Dr. King was there they got out of bed, and they wanted to sing to him. They said this will never happen in a thousand years that we'll have a chance to be in the same place that Dr. King is in and sing for him, so they gave him an impromptu concert right at the Lorraine Motel that first night. And, he thanked them and Public Broadcast Laboratory, PBL, was taking pictures, and they took pictures of that night.

Bill Thomas: And Joe Low was there?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, they were taking pictures, and they took pictures of the choir singing.

Bill Thomas: Where? Was this in the dining room?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, this was upstairs in one of the conference rooms, upstairs. So, afterwards, we talked. It was the first time I had that time, I didn't meet him at the airport because I was running. So, after they left was the first time we had a chance to talk privately, and we just talked.

Bill Thomas: Since Miami?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, since Miami. And so, Ben Hooks was there and some other people. So, Ben says, "You know Billy," he says, "Doc you know what we ought to do is bring the convention to Memphis rather than Shreveport." We were talking about this very convention we are working on now. He said, "Yeah, you know." He said, "What do you think about it Kyles?" I said definitely. I said I think the convention ought to be in Memphis. The movement spirit is here.

Bill Thomas: Somebody had said something to me, I forget now who it is, but that he thought perhaps for a long time Dr. King had rather a bad feeling about Memphis some way or another, or a wrong feeling about it or something. Did you ever get that idea?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I don't think -- well I didn't notice it about Memphis as much as about whether or not to have the Washington march. He had been told by so many of his friends. I think his dilemma at that point was whether to go on with, because some of his most strong supporters had said stuff is going to double-cross you, don't go to Washington. I mean some of his most ardent admirers and everything else,

people in the SCLC even.

Bill Thomas: I see.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And, I think his apprehensions had to do with that more than Memphis as such.

Bill Thomas: But, through the years you don't think (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh no, he always enjoyed coming to Memphis. We had him here, I've got pictures, we had him here for our convention. See, we organized a new convention about 6 years ago away from Jackson. This was Progressive Baptist, and he was one our staunch supporters, and I have got pictures of former president, a lot of pictures when he was the principal speaker. That's the night he spoke, and we always had a Martin Luther King night, and you couldn't, there are some pictures of it -- you couldn't...this was at Metropolitan Church. Now I handled that. You know, I put that program together for them.

Joan Beifuss: Now wait, this is a group of the Baptists that broke off from the...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Progressive Baptists Organized. They broke off from the National Baptists. It is Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the president is Dr. Gardner C. Taylor.

Joan Beifuss: Where is he?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He is from Brooklyn, New York. He came to do the memorial service for us for Dr. King after his assassination, Dr. Taylor did. That's Dr. Taylor seated with him there, but he (muffled). He liked Memphis. The night he spoke you just couldn't even get near the church.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: This was during the convention. Now here's a picture of former Governor Clement was there that night, and Ralph is there. Uh, and he attended sessions whether -- he always got a chance to come to the sessions whether he was on them to speak or not. He just didn't come the night -- this is the kind of guy he was. He just didn't come on the nights that he was on. He would come and attend the sessions, and be with the fellas. You could always reach him and get to him.

Bill Thomas: So, after that, after the (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, we were up in the Lorraine Motel, and it was that night that we would consider moving the convention from Shreveport, Louisiana, SCLC convention to Memphis.

Bill Thomas: So actually seriously considered it at that time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That very night.

Bill Thomas: I see.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Even to the point of we posed for pictures.

Bill Thomas: Oh really?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, and I can't. This guy, I'm trying to get him to find them now. I need to reach him. We posed for pictures that night. We posed for convention pictures that very night.

Bill Thomas: So the decision was made?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was made, that night, really to move it to Memphis.

Bill Thomas: So did the movement here, was that responsible for that decision?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. He liked the movement spirit, and you know. This is where things are happening in the country. They always try to pick a city where something is going on, for a convention.

Bill Thomas: Where was the convention a year ago?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In Atlanta, yeah. They always go to the hotspots, like they were in Jackson at the time of something had been happening down there. But they always tried to move it into a city where something had been going on. So, we posed for pictures that night and decided at that point. That is why I am working so hard on the convention now, that the convention would be here. And he was just really enthused over Memphis, and the way the Negro had come together, and this gave him, I'm sure it gave him hope, encouragement rather, because of all the discouragement that he had about you couldn't get people together on a large, and we had no police security or anything ever at the Mason Temple. We had no guards or anything. And, when people, you'd have 10,000 people around that place and in it, and when they'd get through they'd go home. You know, nobody, no breaking windows or stealing cars. I guess some kids stole some things out of cars and that sort of thing, but you never had any, you know, any problems in it, and this was encouraging because they said that day was over, that you could pull people together in a large -- for a civil rights and they not be destructive. And, I think he was, I'm sure he was encouraged. We had such a huge group and that we were marching every day and no violence had really occurred, except that macing, and it was on the part of the (muffled).

Bill Thomas: That was violence on the other side.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: On the other side, yeah. So, after that we stayed around there until about midnight that night, and they were making plans for the Poor People's Campaign, and so it was just so public in that room they had to go into a little private room to have the meeting in finally. He was trying to get something to eat, and fellas were eating out of his plate, and, just that's the kind of guy he was you know.

Bill Thomas: Let's see, somebody I think had also told us that he was scheduled to have come here, really to Mississippi in connection to (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They went the next day.

Bill Thomas: Yeah, and then he went the next day.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, the staff was quite upset with him that he gave Memphis so much time, because the Poor People's Campaign, you know he needed to get out and raise money for it, and get people involved in it. So, they didn't go to Mississippi until the next day. Yeah, they made all kind, he made all kind of plans and switches. Jim Lawson and Ben and myself, you know, were making the contact for him to come. So, I mean he switched plans as much as he could to come to Memphis, and they went on to Mississippi the next day.

Bill Thomas: You didn't go into Mississippi?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I stayed here. But, it was at that meeting, that first Wednesday night meeting -- we had been toying with the idea, and where it first originated I don't want to say, I had it, and somebody else had it, of calling a one day work stoppage, but we went to think about timing. So, we got this, and what we would generally do many times to keep, we would write little notes to him of certain things that ought to be said about the local situation. He was always very conscious of doing what the local people wanted to do. You know, he never wanted to come in and just impose his own ideas. And, that was the real unfortunate thing about the breaking up of that first march because his staff and group had no connection with it at all. He just really came off the plane in the car and led the march. They did no pre-planning, because he was always conscious of not taking over from the local people. He was very conscious of that. And, we got to him the notion that we wanted to have a one day work stoppage. Well, the way we worked it, and it seemed like it was spontaneous, but Ralph mentioned it after Martin had spoken that night. I introduced Ralph after Martin finished speaking, and he mentioned it. You know, people when Dr. King finishes, everybody gets up and leaves, but hey, Ralph made them stand still after I introduced him, and said, "What we ought to do is not go to school," and that caught their attention; "what we ought to do is not go to work," and that caught their attention. Man that place went up, "YEAH!" And it just sounded beautiful. So, then he and Dr. King came back to the microphone to try and decide what day. He said, "Well, now if you all want to do it, I'll come back and walk with you." You know, so we picked a day. He said, "We can't do it," this was like a Wednesday night I guess, "We can't do it this Friday because I've got to be in Mississippi. What about next Friday? I'll come back." "YEAH!" That was it, it was

set, and that is when we had the great big snow. So, it was called off. Then, they were in Washington. We had to call back and forth 100 times to find out when to reset the march, and that is when we reset it, and he just, he came in you know from the airport and scooted there, and then he was leading. He was just in front of the march when these kids started breaking windows out. And, it was really an overreaction. There weren't 100 young people breaking windows. I doubt it was 100.

Bill Thomas: Now were you in that march, Reverend Kyles?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I was in that march.

Bill Thomas: Where were you?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I was one of the marshals, and I was concerned about most of the marshals who were ministers being at the front. There were not enough people at the back. So, I made it a point to lay back. I stood in the middle of Linden and Hernando. For the first place, I tried to get Jim to let us move that march out. I knew the people were getting restless because I was up and down. I said, "We've got to go. We'll let Dr. King join it. Wherever he comes he can join," but he insisted on waiting. Many people in the rear didn't know he had gotten there. I said, "Jim, they're getting restless, we've got to move out." I kept telling him we've got to move out. Well, they didn't move out, and then we got these false reports about somebody had been killed at Hamilton School because they had sprayed mace on them. All this contributed to it. And then, at the same time, the militants were having a rally inside the church. They were rallying up the kids, had a church full of kids in there while we were waiting.

Joan Beifuss: Oh they did?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And we had to go in and take the microphones out to stop them. And, uh, it was a mistake...

Joan Beifuss: What were they telling them?

Bill Thomas: What were they doing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I didn't stay in there, I don't know, but they were rallying.

Joan Beifuss: Did you go in there and take out the microphone?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, someone did. I was up and down the line. There was something going on on the end down there, and I was trying to keep them calm.

Joan Beifuss: Reverend Kyles, how about the sticks on the signs?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think the union provided them with them, but nobody thought in terms of violence. We hadn't had any, you know, on our side. These fellas had been

saying all the time that, they wanted recognition really, the militants, and we didn't give them -- we tried to work with them. It was just too difficult to try and plan strategy and argue ideology with them. I think it was a fault on our part that we didn't take the time to finally come together, because it was just so difficult. You were up meeting all night, you were marching, and meeting the men every day, and this is what SCLC recognized. You know we had guys that were full time to do nothing but work with militants, and to bring them in and make them feel a part. So, I think the militants really wanted to just embarrass the leadership. I don't think even they realized that the police would have overreacted the way they did. And they may have realized, I don't know. But, uh, I made the point to stand near the rear and get people in line, and I noticed many of them were not walking in the street, but on the sidewalk. So, I tried to get them, you know, to get them in line. The sticks were bad judgment on the part of the union. They were the ones who got it together, never thinking anything would happen. So, we had a police radio, you know, radio.

Bill Thomas: Walkie-talkie.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And we were listening. Not walkie-talkie. We had walkie-talkies, but.

Bill Thomas: You were in on the police net.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I just had one of those little battery radios. And, Floyd Newsom and I were standing. I said, "Floyd, let's stay here because everybody else is trying to be up front." I was at the front when Dr. King got out of the car, and when they finally made it to the line and went on through, and he was disturbed at that point, because to have been so unorganized. And, I kept telling them to, that not to let him start at that point because when he comes the cameras, and the people are going to surge around him. Even the preachers. You know, I mean it is just annoying that they do it, they just surge around, want to be, shake hands with him in the middle of a march. You know, and this sort of thing, and it just.

Bill Thomas: It just delays everything more.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah. It was just mass confusion. So, I said let the line go ahead and be marching, and slip him in at any point between here and City Hall. As a matter of fact you could have had him waiting at City Hall, and it wouldn't have mattered, as long as he was there. It wouldn't have mattered. So, that was disturbing a little bit. They had a hard time getting him out of the car because people just surrounded the car when the car got there, which was poor planning on our part. Anyway, when they finally got the thing moving, I stood there. I said, Floyd let's stay back here because all the marshals have gone down front. Let's stay in the back because if something happens back here we'll know what's going on. So, the people were still, say about the Clayborn Temple and up to Linden Street when I heard on the radio that they started breaking windows. I heard Chief Lux, or somebody was talking about it.

Joan Beifuss: Now, wait a minute, had the end of the march got (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, it had not left the church.

Joan Beifuss: It was still at Clayborn?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was still at Clayborn Temple.

Bill Thomas: When you heard ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: When I heard that they were breaking windows, it was still moving out. I was standing in the middle of Linden and Hernando, and they said they're breaking -- Floyd said, "Oh, they've started something." I said, "Oh what is it?" He said, "They're breaking windows." He said, "(muffled)." Anyway, we heard this voice ask for permission to break up the march, permission to break up the march. Never got it. They've started breaking out more windows. Well, before they asked for permission to break up the march, Jim and Jesse Turner and others has turned the march around. We had stopped the march before the police started beating people. They said, this won't work. When they started breaking out windows, the leadership up front decided, let's go back and regroup. You know, and weed out, or do something. And they had turned the people around. They were trying to turn the people around before they had gotten permission to break up the march. Well, when we heard this, the people had left the church. They had gotten up. You know, the tail end was up to about where we were, but they had not gotten to Beale, so all the people in the street from Linden to Beale, we ran, Floyd and I ran ahead, and when we got to Beale, the guy had said, "permission granted," and we cut off all the people from Beale to Linden and said, "Go back to the church." You know, in the street. We turned those people around and sent them back to the church. Well, I remained standing in the middle of Beale and Hernando, and when I looked I could hear this rumbling, all these windows, glass (imitates sound), you know the glass was being, the windows being broken, and kids were throwing them and running, just break and run. And, I hollered at many of them, "Hey boy, put that stick down." And, I stood there and kept them from breaking out the liquor store right on the corner. They wanted to go in there. I stood there and guarded the liquor store myself. And Floyd said, (muffled).

Bill Thomas: This was on the corner of Beale and...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And Hernando.

Bill Thomas: And Hernando, yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I guarded that myself. And they were throwing sticks and running. Well, it was after they would throw them and run, that others went in. Other youths went in and started looting, but no one really broke a window and went in -- I can't say no one, but from where I could see. But the thing that frightened me, all these people were turning and they were coming back. They were actually coming back.

Some were running, and they started shooting tear gas. Well, tear gas guns make the same noise that a gun makes. And there were some people falling and tripping, and I said, "Oh God, they're shooting people." And I had a wife and 3 kids in this. Somewhere in that -- and it was the most horrible feeling I've ever had about something like this. I have been in demonstrations. I have never had any fear, but I was really scared, not for myself, but for my family that they were in this sea of people just coming, and the cops were just beating people unmercifully. For no reason, I mean they weren't beating the looters, now. They might have gotten a few, but they simply waded into the crowd and started beating people who were coming back. You know, women and men just coming back. They had already turned around, they were coming back. And this was the horrible part. They were just beating; you know, not just looters, but when they got permission to break up the march they waded in to break it up. They were vicious.

Bill Thomas: Did you hear the permission granted.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes.

Bill Thomas: They finally did get that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes.

Bill Thomas: Were the people running?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: When they started shooting tear gas they started running, but otherwise they turned around and they were walking. And then when they started shooting this tear gas, you know people thought they were shooting live ammunition so they started. They were actually coming back down Beale, then they started going all directions. And I think my wife lost my girls, and I was standing there trying to guard the liquor store, and asking the police, "Why are you beating people like that?" You know, how I didn't get hit, I don't know how in the world I didn't get hit. Maybe they knew me, or I don't know what. Jesse Turner didn't get hit. We were out there. I had that yellow thing on my arm, too. Maybe that was why, I don't know. But they just came down the street beating people. So, we finally got the people back to the church. And some of the youths -- the youths were mad by this time. They started throwing at police. They did throw missiles at the police, and they kept shooting tear gas. So, we got them to withdraw from the area. They wouldn't go all the way back. They drew back, and then we started letting the -- well it was just mass confusion inside the church first of all.

Bill Thomas: Do you know whether any tear gas was shot inside the church building?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Very definitely.

Bill Thomas: It was?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And inside the minimum salary. We called Holloman and

said come out here and see it if you don't believe it. He said, "No, no gas has been shot in the church." I cried. I mean I had gas. They sprayed mace in my little girl's eye. First of all, what is the point in spraying -- we had gotten back to the church. I had finally got my family. I said, "You all go in the building and stay until I can get you home." By this time I am feeling terrible y'all. Before we could get inside the building Ralph locked the door. I said, "Open the door." He let us in, but my little girls saw the police coming running with sticks, and they ran on the side between Clayborn Temple and the building. I looked around and they were gone. I couldn't find them. My wife had gone inside. They were frightened with the police coming, and they ran, and the police ran up in there and sprayed mace in her face, you know. But they finally got in the church.

Bill Thomas: How old is this girl?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: She was 10. She was 10 or 11. And, people were in the church crying, and you know, lost from their children. And they were out there. Now nobody was doing anything. The looting had stopped and everything else. The police could have withdrawn and we could have handled it, but they stayed there. I mean, once they mace you or tear-gas you, there is nothing, you are just completely helpless. There is no point in beating on you. So, finally I got my family inside, and I went over and tried to put other families together. They did spray -- the youths would throw at them, and then run back to the church.

Joan Beifuss: Inside the church or around it?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Run back inside the church. So, that is when they shot tear gas in there.

Bill Thomas: So they thought that most of the reaction was coming from inside the church didn't they?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, they knew the guys were going back in there, so they were going to clear the church out again, I guess.

Joan Beifuss: Did anyone inside the church try to keep the kids from coming back indoors?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. We had a man in the truck all the time. See, we could have handled it if the police had left the area period. You know, they just withdrew back to Linden, but they never left, and people had to go that way. Now, if they had gone back up and protected the stores and all that, which they could have done. You know, line up on the street and protect the stores, but we had to get the people out of the building, and people were frightened to go out because they had been beaten. All kinds of stories were coming, that a little girl had been shot and trampled, and you had the rumors to deal with.

Joan Beifuss: Was anyone in charge, or did anyone have the microphone in the church? Was anyone trying to ... ?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were trying to put it together at that point, and we were making announcements about trying to put people together. But, we had a man in the truck outside of the church the whole time, telling the youths to stop, and go in the church and wait; asking the police to pull back.

Bill Thomas: Who was this, now, Reverend Kyles?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I have forgotten his name, but it was Crittenden's truck. We had a sign on the truck of our own.

Bill Thomas: Was this the pickup truck?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, the pickup truck.

Bill Thomas: Did it have a flat tire? I heard that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It might have had a flat tire, I don't know. It may have. But they shot tear gas in the minimum salary building also, and they claim they didn't because when I got ready to get my family to the car finally, I had to put a handkerchief over my face and I was crying for days, you know. So, I stayed around there I guess. But, it was just -- that was unbelievable.

Joan Beifuss: At that point was there anyone left in charge really of what was left of the march?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, all the leaders were there. Nobody left. We were all there.

Joan Beifuss: I mean, was there any kind of control over the crowd in the church, though, or was it just (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. We were dealing with the militants at the same time, and then we were trying to match families, get people back together because there were a lot of children, and we were reading and asking the people to be calm -- go home and wait until you hear from us further.

Joan Beifuss: I had heard also that some children had been left behind in the church when their parents marched. Was that, was there babysitting in the church while the parents marched?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It may have been, I am not sure, it may have been. But, we had wounded people in the church. We had to get the ambulances in and out. Our telephone lines were tied up, we couldn't use the phone.

Bill Thomas: Did you hear that some of the ambulances didn't want to come in, into the area?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I didn't. We only called Negro ambulances, so we had no problem getting them in there. As a matter of fact, we had 3 ambulances escorting the march.

Bill Thomas: On hand, I see, yes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: So, now we were not organized to the point of having medical people, or a medical team. My wife just sort of impromptu organized some people to take care of girls who had a reaction to the gas, to the mace and stuff. Several people were having convulsions, and we had some...

Bill Thomas: There were people that got sick from the gas (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yeah, from the gas, and we had stretched them out in the church and we had to get them to the hospital. Then the report came that they were beating people all over town, and the looting was spreading, and that is when they imposed the curfew.

Joan Beifuss: Do you have any idea how long you stayed in Clayborn Temple?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were there until about 4:00 that evening.

Joan Beifuss: And there was still a crowd of people in there until about ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Not, not, not, not, not necessarily a crowd, but there were people milling around. A lot of people were afraid to go out because of the police. Now, we said draw back and we will get the people home. They would draw back, and whatever the youths would do, if they would throw or say something, they would start beating at them, or throwing at them again, and like playing games with kids, and responsible grown people were trying to get home. And, we would go out and try to tell the youths, grab them, and -- so we finally got them under control and they went -- we got everybody out (muffled).

Bill Thomas: How about the sanitation men? What happened to them (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They were more or less just a part of the group at this point.

Bill Thomas: They got sort of lost in the crowd.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah. We had some who served as marshals, and that tear gas and stuff, and the looting was really too much for -- and I hate to tell you, there was not a lot of looting. I saw fellas come out of Paul's with material, and I would holler at them,

“Put that stuff down!” But, I don’t think -- I don’t know what the estimate was, maybe \$20,000. I don’t, you know, you don’t, when you talk about a million dollars, I don’t think you’re talking about too much. But, it would not have been that bad if it had not been for the overreaction of the police department just beating people, and that created a great deal of resentment. I mean they were just vicious. There was no need for that kind of thing. And, then we told Holloman they were shooting tear gas in our building. He says, “No, they’re not doing that.” And, the burn, I can take you right now and show you where the canister fell. I know it was in there.

Bill Thomas: In the church now, or the minimal salary?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: The minimum salary. They shot it in the lobby of the church, in the vestibule. They wouldn’t go in the church, they were afraid. I think they did get to the vestibule once or twice. And, that’s the worst they can do, invade -- this is the one place we feel is ours, and this happened, you remember some years ago. A Sheriff in Alabama somewhere went into a church with his hat on to get Martin, I think. And, that was the worst thing they could have ever done -- went in a church with his hat on, and bringing Martin out. But, you don’t invade the black church. I mean this is our one sanctuary, and they broke that law. So, we left after we finally got things under control. I sent my family on home. John Spence, who works with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, had a government car, and I got John’s car and I got him to drive me over to Rivermont, where we went to talk to Martin. He was very upset.

Bill Thomas: Now, how did you know that Dr. King was there, at the Rivermont?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Well, the word had gotten back to us, to meet there. And, this thing about him deserting, and the newspapers played that up. And, I wasn’t reading the papers at that time. You sent some material to us, about a newspaper. Didn’t you send some materials? Some newspaper copies?

Joan Beifuss: (muffled), yes.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I glanced through them the other night. But, I didn’t know what they were saying at that point. His aides, you know, took him away. Because we thought the worst thing that could happen would be for Martin Luther King to get, something -- police to crack him on his head during the march.

Joan Beifuss: Was there any kind of, oh I’m sure there must have been, any kind of policy about getting Dr. King out of the march?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: It always is. The decision is never left to him, because he never goes into the march without 2 aides. If you’d leave it to him, he’d stay there. But, we recognize what would happen. So, they’ll have to, in many cases, just pick him up literally and take him away from certain things. And, the Rivermont was chosen because we wanted a place -- now I heard 2 stories why the Rivermont was chosen, and I don’t know which one is true.

Bill Thomas: What was? Well could you tell us?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know, one was because they wanted a place, sort of that we could meet later on secretively, well you know, sort of secretively I guess. And the other was that the Sheraton and all the other hotels, well it was obvious if you go back to the Lorraine everybody is going to be over there after the thing.

Bill Thomas: Also, wasn't it true that it would have been very difficult to have gotten back through that area?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In that area at all, yeah, you had to get out of the area. Yeah.

Joan Beifuss: Did you ever find out exactly how he got to the Rivermont?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In a car. I really didn't, you know, I heard stories about it, but I just didn't put any credit to them, and I didn't. To me, at that time that wasn't really important, and I didn't follow through. I don't know.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, we have just never been able to find out whether it was just someone driving past, who they flagged down, or.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I just really don't remember, I don't know.

Bill Thomas: Do you know who, Reverend Kyles, who left the march with him?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, because I was with, like I said I was way in the back, and I haven't talked about that phase of it with anybody. I simply haven't.

Bill Thomas: What was the, what was the scene in Dr. King's quarters there at the Rivermont when you arrived?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, he had a bedroom and a waiting room, a living area, and he and his aids were in trying to evaluate what happened. And, the leadership that we told -- we didn't want, we just wanted certain people like Reverend Starks, and Lawson, and myself, and others to meet to find out, you know, and we were in another room and we were waiting for some other people to come. And actually he had taken off his trousers and had his shirt and shorts on. He was under the cover, you know, covered with the spread, sitting in the bed like this. And, we were waiting for, I guess Jim at that time. So, we all finally came into that room, and (muffled).

Bill Thomas: In the bedroom?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, when Jim got there. There were some other people there like John Spence, and we kept John on the phone to do certain things. So, we were seated around the room, and trying to backtrack to find out -- because he really didn't

have any idea of what had happened, because they hadn't worked with us. He just came to lead the march. And, he was very disturbed. I sat on the bed, and he asked, we talked, and he asked me some questions, and he asked Jim some questions.

Joan Beifuss: Was he angry?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he wasn't angry, not at all. He was just upset, you know. His aides were more angry than anything else, that we would bring him into a situation like that, without really telling them that the possibility was there. Especially on the heels of having had the criticism about mass march days are over, nonviolent.

Bill Thomas: He was aware that some of the Negro youths had broken the windows, or did he really know what had happened?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, I think the TV, he had the TV on, and looked at it.

Joan Beifuss: Had the local leadership expected anything like this at all? Had there even the remotest possibility?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They kept telling us, but we just didn't believe it.

Joan Beifuss: Who kept talking?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The militants kept saying that it can happen. You know, so. We thought black people were so together that nobody would do anything like that. And, you know. And they were mostly teenagers. We just didn't -- we thought that we had really come together, that nobody would do -- that you would be playing into Charlie's hands to do something like this. And, like I say, I think it was really more of a thing that they wanted to be recognized, and we didn't get -- you know, the preachers have always been the leaders and that sort of thing, and they had a definite contribution they wanted to make, and we didn't recognize them, and I think this is really what set them off. Of course we tried, we just didn't know how. We hadn't worked together with them. When I say, "we," I mean I have individually, but I am just one voice in COME, and there were many things that went on that I didn't agree with, because of my own experience, and there were a lot of new people working in COME, but if you are going to have a community organization, you've got to give and take. So, I gave on a lot of things. I gave on the security for Dr. King, because my thought when he came for the convention I called Commissioner Armour and said, "Alright, give me 2 soul brothers," and he put them at my disposal. If I said I wanted 10, Dr. King is going to be in town, "they're yours Reverend Kyles." And, many times they would beat me to the airport and pick Martin up. They loved him, too. The black policemen, and they would be right with him, you know. Of course, I don't think that any -- I don't see, I said this before, in my own mind any way of having prevented what went on. When a guy in America makes up his mind to get you, you're just got, you know. But, that was just an example of the kind of thing. I had the kind of relationship with the police department, as bad as the attitude is toward Negroes, I was not so hung up that I wouldn't call and ask for

security for Martin King when he came to town.

Bill Thomas: Who is against security? Was it SCLC, or COME?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, COME primarily felt that to sneer at the police -- no, that's not, that to work with the police would have been defeating what -- we knew the police, we felt that the police were Loeb's men, and the fight was with Loeb, so it is with his police. My feeling was, that the police, was the fight was not with the police at this point. Let's take the police on as a separate thing. You know, don't play games with the police, you know. You don't have to -- I mean he did not have to send spies into our meetings. There is nothing going in our meetings that is so secretive we don't want them to know. Let them come on in there, but just come as uniformed policemen and stand around the walls if they wanted, but don't come sneaking. My feeling was, why play games? Why fight the police and city hall at the same time? Let's take it one by... if we need protection, you know send some black brothers. They'll protect Dr. King. I mean, we don't have any problems with them. And, if I needed traffic cops for the conventions, like if I need them for SCLC convention -- I needed them with Holloman. You know, I guess I'd get the same thing, but with Armour, anything we asked for Armour always tried to give it to us. I mean I say that, with all the other problems, we had the police because I recognized that if you're having one problem with the mayor and everybody else, there is no point in fighting the whole group at one time, especially if you're going to need them. You need them to direct traffic then I'm going to get them.

Joan Beifuss: Let me ask you something. During the earlier days of the strike, there was a great deal more cooperation with the police wasn't there in terms of, oh for instance when the march that was maced, there was talking between the leaders and the police at that time on how they would march down Main Street.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes.

Joan Beifuss: Now, is it true that the police were never informed of the route of that first march?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, maybe they were not informed officially. That is one of the things I mean. In my judgment, I would have given it to them.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah. Now, the point I was trying to get to, was there a change of feeling within the COME organization that there had been too much police cooperation earlier?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, yes for this reason. I heard somebody mention, you know the marches are becoming ineffective now. The marches are walking along chatting with the police. Well, what's wrong with that? The argument is not with the police. If you want a confrontation, this is something different. If you're going to march for symbolic reasons, this is something different. This is what I'm saying. We had differences of opinion, I just didn't fight hard enough to get mine through, because

I'd say somehow that the cause was so right I am sure it will win, so I didn't, I would never get so mad and say if you don't do it my way it's not going to be done. But, so what if you're walking along talking with the police? You know, I've always done it. I have talked to them when they've arrested me. You know? I don't transfer. So, well they would say, "Kyles, you weren't maced, you were in Miami." I would say, okay, you got me there. But when they mace me I don't know how I'm going to feel, I may not want to walk along and talk to them either, so I didn't. But, the only point I am trying to make is that it was not only on the Negroes part. Holloman it seems to me was playing games, playing little detective, or Dick Tracy or somebody by trying to infiltrate.

END OF RECORDING