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3521 Ordway St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
April 2, 1967

Rev. Martin Luther King
332 Auburn Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

PERSONAL

Dear Dr. King:

Your recent pronouncements which now go so far as to suggest the possibility of encouraging civil disobedience over Vietnam, cause me a great personal dilemma.

You will see enclosed my annual SCLC Sustaining Contributors Card. I never thought I would find myself in a position whereby it might seem morally indefensible to contribute to SCLC. But that, sir, is my awful problem.

I belong to a school of thought which I hope is large. To wit: I find it totally consistent to be willing to die, if necessary, for the cause of civil rights in the United States and, equally, to die, if necessary, to defend the rights of those to whom we have pledged our aid in Vietnam.

I do not mean to argue the issue. You undoubtedly know my position and I know yours. Vietnam is one of the most complex issues in our national history. I am a man who can respect your point of view and I do. And I know enough about you to know that you can at once respect and disagree with me. But if I see my contributions going increasingly to support a campaign against Vietnam, where am I left? That is not my purpose in supporting SCLC.

And yet, would it not be a vicious way to show my objection if I withdrew my support from SCLC? There is my dilemma. I expect that I will resolve it by continuing, as in the past, to give all I can to the negro scholarship fund, the legal defense fund, the ACLU, etc. But I deeply regret that I can no longer in good conscience pay help pay the overhead of the extremely important SCLC.

I have pondered this deeply. I know that the civil rights movement relates closely to Vietnam. I know the national treasure being expended on Vietnam detracts from the civil rights programs. I know that a deprived negro family in an overcrowded tenement finds scarce comfort in the thought that his welfare may be subordinated to the progress of a war on the other side of the world. And yet I feel so strongly that this is one of the many times in US history where domestic priorities must be temporarily re-arranged in order to secure the survival necessary to fight the domestic causes that I simply cannot support any agency which uses its power to oppose a foreign policy in which I deeply believe. I believe I am right and that is all there is to say. If we are not successful in our foreign policies, the grandchildren of the deprived tenement dwellers of today will not be members of tomorrow's American middle classes.

Respectfully yours,

Jay H. Cerf

