

To Darrell Randall

13 November 1958
[*Montgomery, Ala.*]

King explains to Randall, of the National Council of Churches, the motivations underlying his plan (subsequently abandoned) to visit the Soviet Union.¹

Dr. Darrell Randall
National Council of Churches
297 Fourth Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Dr. Randall:

Thanks for your very kind letter of recent date concerning my interest in going to Russia incident to my visit to India. First, I must apologize for being somewhat tardy in my reply. Unfortunately, your letter was misplaced during my secretary's daily trips between the office and my residence where I am convalescing. Although we have not been able to find the letter yet, I think I am sufficiently familiar with the contents to venture a reply.²

As I remember, you mentioned that Dr. Nelson of the American Baptist Convention had expressed great interest in this trip, and also the possibility of pro-

1. In a 23 March 1959 letter to Reuben E. Nelson, secretary general of the American Baptist Convention, King explained his reasons for canceling the trip to the Soviet Union, which he initially scheduled as an extended stopover on his return from India. King acknowledged that the time was not right for the visit and expressed the fear that the trip "would have taken on too many political connotations" (see also "King Studies Russia Trip," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 6 December 1958). Darrell D. Randall (1916–), born in Union, Nebraska, received a B.A. (1939) from Nebraska Wesleyan University and an M.A. (1942) from the University of Nebraska. Randall received a second M.A. (1946) from Columbia University and a Ph.D. (1956) from the University of Chicago. An expert on economic development in Asia and Africa, Randall served as associate executive director of the Department of International Affairs for the National Council of Churches (1958–1961).

2. Randall's letter to King has not been located.

13 Nov 1958 viding some funds to meet the budget. Naturally, I was very happy to know this. My reasons for desiring to go to the Soviet Union may be stated as follows:

1. Manifold international policies emerge from a limited number of important world centers. Events taking place in the United States, Russia, and India affect the life of every person on this earth. Increasingly, religious leaders, scientists, scholars, and statesmen have come to see that firsthand investigation in these important centers is an integral part of their ability to exercise their leadership responsibilities.
2. In the coming period when travel to the Soviet Union is more usual, I believe the American people will expect committed leaders to get information by serious personal inquiry rather than to rely upon secondary sources. The people will tend to respect conclusions which are based on observations and direct examination. According to my ability, I wish to be able to interpret to our people the deeper and more obscure currents of thought which dominate other peoples as well as the assumptions on which their social institutions are constructed. To do this it is necessary that personal contact be established so that both the good and the destructive elements and trends can be illustrated, analyzed and understood.
3. Among some of the more specific lines of inquiry I wish to pursue are those which would illuminate the reasons for the continued existence of religious conviction among millions of Soviet citizens, all of whom have been subjected to varying degrees of oppression and discouragement by powerful agencies of propaganda and anti-religious education. This tenacity to spiritual commitment is worthy of careful study for these precise methods to the control of man's relationship to God may be unique in human experience.
4. As a Baptist I am especially interested to be in contact with the large number of practicing Baptists within the Soviet Union.
5. As a Negro I have special concern with the influence that Soviet theory and practice have had upon the millions of colored peoples who populate the less industrially developed areas of the world. As a believer in non-violence as revealed in the teachings of Jesus Christ, I am anxious to examine the reactions of the people in a society which for so many years has sought to deny the basic spiritual and moral doctrine of Christianity.
6. As one who attempts to adhere to a non-violent philosophy I am anxious to experience the reaction of Soviet officials and people to those of us who hold to the view that peace and justice are possible to the degree that the world uncompromisingly embraces the Judeo-Christian ideals.³

I have made some contact on the possible budget for a trip to Soviet Russia from India. The cost per day per person for visiting the Soviet Union is thirty-five

3. In a December draft of a letter to A. J. Muste, A. Philip Randolph, Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party, and James Hicks of the *New York Amsterdam News*, King further elaborated on his reasons for desiring to go to Russia: "The fact that the great need today is that men everywhere should realize that non-violence is the philosophical assumption from which peace and justice can spring, led me to the conclusion that perhaps it was my duty to visit Russia and to express there my basic beliefs."

dollars (\$35.00). This includes hotel, train travel within the Soviet Union, plane travel where necessary, board and lodging, interpreter, automobile, and chauffeur. In other words, in-tourist, arrangements for all this and the cost is thirty-five dollars (\$35.00) per day per person. Mrs. King will be accompanying me on this trip and possibly a personal secretary. On the assumption that three persons were in the Soviet Union for ten days, the cost for this would be three hundred and fifty dollars (\$350.00) each, or one thousand fifty dollars (\$1,050.00).

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In addition to the plane fare America-India return, going back by way of the Soviet Union would be three hundred eleven dollars per person, or nine hundred thirty-three dollars (\$933.00) for the three of us. This would mean a total budget of approximately two thousand dollars.

I certainly hope that something can be worked out. I realize that this is asking a great deal, and if it is not possible, I can thoroughly understand. I am deeply grateful to you and the National Council of Churches for your prompt consideration of this matter. I am also grateful to Dr. Nelson of the American Baptist Convention. And I would appreciate your expressing my gratitude to him. I will look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr.

TLc. MLKP-MBU: Box 5.