

From Myles Horton

20 March 1959
Monteagle, Tenn.

Highlander Folk School director Myles Horton updates King on the Tennessee legislature's investigation of the leadership training school. Shortly after King's September 1957 address at Highlander, the Georgia Commission on Education

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published a report alleging that the school was a Communist front organization.¹ For the next several years, southern state officials and segregationist groups used the allegations to thwart Highlander's efforts to promote racial and economic justice.

Dr. Martin Luther King
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
454 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Martin:

I noticed that you had returned from your trip to India which I know you must have enjoyed.

While you were away, the Tennessee legislature investigated Highlander, as you will see from the enclosures. I am sending you a copy of the Nashville Tennessean which carries a feature story on the investigation and an article by Joe Hatcher, the Tennessean's veteran political reporter.²

There are two reasons why I think you will be interested. One, your interest in Highlander, and two, the fact that your name came up, both in the questioning and in the final report. You were listed along with Aubrey Williams, Jim Dombrowski, Pete Seeger and Abner Berry, as proof of Highlander's Communist connections.³ I assured the committee that while we were very proud of your having been at Highlander, they were mistaken about your being subversive. Frankly however I do not think they were greatly impressed by my efforts to set the record straight.

The present status of the investigation is a recommendation from the state legislature that legal proceedings be taken to cancel Highlander's charter and to find me and put me in jail if the evidence warrants.⁴ It will not be surprising to you to learn that they dropped the charges of subversion and just decided to close Highlander anyway.

I hope I will have an opportunity to sit down and talk to you about more important matters someday.

1. Georgia Commission on Education, "Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School, Monteagle, Tenn.," October 1957. For King's Highlander address, see "A Look to the Future," Address Delivered at Highlander Folk School's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Meeting, 2 September 1957, in *Papers* 4:269-276.

2. Horton probably enclosed the 5 March edition containing the articles "Horton Denies Bennett Charge" by Garry Fullerton and "Can Probers Prolong Dull Show?" by Joe Hatcher.

3. Barton Demet et al., "Committee report to the members of the eighty-first session of the general assembly of the state of Tennessee," 6 March 1959. Williams, a resident of Montgomery, was a former New Deal administrator and president of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF). Dombrowski, executive director of SCEF, had once served on Highlander's staff. Pete Seeger, a folk singer who was blacklisted in the 1950s for his political activities, helped popularize the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome." Berry was a reporter for the *Daily Worker*, a Communist Party newspaper. All were at Highlander during the weekend of King's 1957 address.

4. For more on the State of Tennessee's efforts to close Highlander, see Anne Braden to King, 23 September 1959, pp. 290-293 in this volume.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Cordially yours,
[*signed*] Myles
Myles Horton

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TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 28.