

[Will Alexander?] to [Clark]

Foreman, 8-27-26,

re "The LaBelle matter."

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Legal Aid

August 27, 1928

My dear Clark:

I was anxious to talk over the LaBelle matter with you before I went away for a little vacation. Three or four things occur to me in connection with it:

1. I think we must go through with it as rapidly and thoroughly as possible, and I hope you will spend on it any time you can spare from now until the time you go away, with the hope that some of the rest of us can follow it up after you are gone.

2. You will note the letter which I have written to the National Association. We will have to cooperate with them in the case in any way that they see fit, since they were already in the case when we were appealed to. I feel, however, that there will be no embarrassment on this point.

3. I am sure our executive committee would be unwilling to "take charge of the prosecution of the case". We would, however, be willing to back to the limit the local citizens in their efforts to deal with their problem. Therefore, I would suggest that you make it perfectly clear to these men who signed the appeal to us that our cooperation is with the understanding that we will act through them, and that we need not necessarily be known in the case, - that the leadership must be in their hands.

4. Any money we put into it will be to match money which has been raised in Florida and which they send through our treasury in order that we may be able to use it with the Spelman Fund. This seems to me not an unreasonable request, and I am sure that it is one which they would be willing to follow. They can begin to send in funds raised in Florida just as soon as they desire - the sooner the better. We will return a check with the money matched to someone whom they will designate as the treasurer of their local committee.

5. As to the employment of a detective - this should be done by the local committee with whatever advice from us and others they desire. They ought to take the initiative, however, and if there is some one in Florida whom they can employ, all the better; otherwise, if they request us to secure a man, we shall be glad to do so, although frankly I haven't the slightest idea how we would go about it.

6. As to the securing of a lawyer, it would seem to me that the State of Florida, through its governor and attorney general, ought to assist in the prosecution of this case, either by employing special council who would assist the local officers or by sending the attorney general himself into the case. I wonder if they have appealed to the governor on this score. Even if he did not help, there would be a moral gain in doing so. Any additional attorneys employed should, if possible, be employed from among the Florida bar. It would seem to me a very great advantage if the State Bar Association's executive committee would nominate some member of the Florida bar to help in the prosecution of the case, furnishing services voluntarily, if possible, if not, to be compensated out of the monies which it is contemplated to raise. In handling the matter this way, we would secure the sympathy of the State Bar Association and begin to build a foundation for Florida's handling cases of this sort in the future.

By following these suggestions you would have (1) the whole legal machinery of the State back of you, and (2) the State Bar Association and, if possible, the State Chamber of Commerce cooperation and furnishing additional legal talent.

I would suggest:

1. That you communicate these ideas to the local committee in LaBelle as being the reaction of our executive committee to their suggestion, assuring them of our willingness to cooperate with them, or with anybody else who comes into the case, if the general plan laid down in this statement meets with their approval.

2. I talked the whole matter over with Mr. Underwood and others, and they were all of the opinion that it would be inadvisable to bring a lawyer from outside of Florida into the case. The reasons for this are obvious, but you may need to go into them with the LaBelle Committee. Confidentially, I wonder if in the back of the heads of the LaBelle committee there isn't a sort of unrecognized desire to do this thing in such a way as to get publicity for themselves. We need to guide them away from this point and hold them steadily to the purpose of securing a conviction; and this certainly would be very much surer with Florida lawyers

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in charge of the case. I wish you would elaborate this with the committee.

3. I think it would be desirable in all of this for some one to go back to Florida,- yourself, if possible - and go with the representative of the local LaBelle committee to see the governor to the end that the active participation of the state legal department be secured in the prosecution of the case, either through the state's attorney himself or through special council whom they would employ. At the same time, the State Chamber of Commerce and the State Bar Association should be appealed to to secure the service of the most outstanding lawyer in Florida to cooperate in the case, and, if possible, these organizations to bear the expense.

4. I agree heartily with your suggestion that a state committee ought to be organized in Florida at the earliest possible date. Go forward with this as rapidly and as far as you can before you go away, and we will follow it up. If necessary, set a date. This will probably necessitate a visit to Florida. It will be necessary to get some two or three people in Florida who would send out the invitations to the persons who would be invited to this preliminary meeting. I think of a small committee,- for example, Bishop Juhn, Mrs. Atkinson, head of the Community Chest in Tampa, etc. I use these as examples; your familiarity with the personnel of the State will enable you to suggest others. The letter should be sent out on the stationery of one of the members from a Florida post office, and not through this office. I would not consider it important that we have a large attendance. It should be carefully selected, and should include men and women in the State known to be interested. Mrs. Henderson could probably help you to line up the women.

I have been unable as yet to get a line on anybody to take your work. Moor is the only prospect we have had, and I waited until it was finally settled regarding him before aggressively going after anybody. I have a good many lines out, but none of them has as yet yielded anything.

I am sorry not to have seen you personally, but as yet I have been unable to get any vacation and I want to get up to our cottage for the weekend and incidentally to see if I cannot find among the men who have been trained in Southern Y.M.C.A. College some one who might be brought into this work in Georgia. Since they are closing right away, it is necessary for me to go ahead today without waiting further to talk with you. I hope you will postpone your going until the last possible minute in order that we may follow through as far as possible with this Florida matter.

Sincerely,