

ITS INQUIRY ON RAY

But High Officials Do Not Believe There Is Evidence of Conspiracy in Murder

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 10—

The Justice Department said today it was continuing its investigation into a possible conspiracy in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

High officials who have been close to the case believe James Earl Ray acted alone and there was no conspiracy. But Dr. King's widow, Mrs. Coretta King, and his successor as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, said they believed there had been.

After Ray pleaded guilty to a state charge of murder in Memphis today and was sentenced to 99 years in prison, the Justice Department said through a spokesman:

"The investigation into the conspiracy allegation is still open."

Do Not Have Evidence

It was learned through other sources, however, that although the possibility of a conspiracy had not been dismissed and indeed that the investigation would continue, Federal officials do not have evidence to show that Ray was hired to kill Dr. King or that he plotted the assassination with anyone.

To the contrary, some sources say, there is reason to believe Ray acted alone. Nor is there skepticism about the court procedures that were followed in Memphis in which Ray's guilty plea and the sentence were arranged in advance. The Justice Department was notified in advance of what was taking place.

other Federal agencies mounted a massive international investigation in the search for the killer. One official said that in manpower involved it probably exceeded any previous investigation, even that into the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

"We never gave up looking for a conspiracy," said one official source, "but we did not

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find any evidence."

This is true, it was explained, even though at one point the F.B.I. actually charged a conspiracy. On April 17, the F.B.I. in Birmingham, Ala., filed a warrant against Eric Starvo Galt, one of Ray's aliases, charging that on March 29, 1968, he "and an individual whom he alleged to be his brother entered into a conspiracy which continued until on or about April 5, 1968, to injure, oppress, threaten or intimidate Martin Luther King Jr." in his right to travel freely from state to state.

Rights Law Invoked

The charge, brought under an 1870 civil rights law, was based on an investigation that showed that Ray had bought a rifle and telescopic site in a Birmingham store, saying that it was for his brother who was

planning a hunting trip to Canada.

Although there was no evidence of a brother involved, that investigation was the basis for a Federal charge under the ancient law that had been invoked in almost all major civil rights criminal cases.

Ray was arrested in London on June 8. The warrant issued in Birmingham continues in effect, the Justice Department said today.

Federal officials acknowledged that there were several other circumstances that indicated a conspiracy. Ray spent money lavishly before his capture during international travels. There were published accounts in which Ray was said to have said from his prison cell that he was acting under orders of a light-haired Latin named Raoul who gave him thousands of dollars. Shortly after Dr. King was shot, a

Memphis police radio directed officers in a false pursuit of a white Mustang automobile.

But none of these checked out, according to Federal officials. Ray got his money from robberies, they said. In one London store his fingerprints were found on a bag from which a large amount of money had been taken.

There is no basis for believing Ray's contention, voiced in the courtroom today, that there was a conspiracy, the Federal sources said.

On the other hand, they said there was reason to believe Ray acted alone, that his behavior in the past had been "too erratic" and "too unreliable" for anyone to consider trusting him in a conspiracy. His hatred of Negroes was so intense, they added, that he needed no one to urge him on in the crime.

The Justice Department was not consulted about the ar-

range that was worked out in the Tennessee court. It was informed of what was about to happen because F.B.I. testimony was needed, but it was not asked if the procedure were wise, official sources said.

Under the separation of powers between the state and Federal governments, the Justice Department refrained from exercising any judgment in the matter, it was explained.

44-703-78

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MAR 12 1969	
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