

Prot blasts ted probe of M.L. King slaying

By ALAN LEVIN

A BAY STATE professor charged that a congressional investigation into Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination was "incompetent" and failed to probe a possible conspiracy in the murder.

Professor Philip Melanson — in an interview yesterday before the 20th anniversary of the civil rights leader's shooting in Memphis — said James Earl Ray apparently was backed by a sophisticated conspiracy that helped him flee the country.

But Melanson, a South-eastern Massachusetts University political scientist who specializes in assassinations, said that evidence of the conspiracy was left unexamined by the 1978 Select Committee on Assassinations.

"They weren't capable of pursuing real conspiratorial leads," Melanson said. Congress instead offered evidence of a separate conspiracy, but "they had no proof," he charged. The case was reopened

by Congress in 1978 after revelations that the FBI had conducted an extensive spying and harassment operation against King.

The committee concluded that Ray probably killed King for money. Investigators also uncovered evidence that three St. Louis men put up a \$50,000 bounty for King's death.

Melanson discounted the St. Louis conspiracy, saying there is no link between the men and Ray.

But Notre Dame law professor G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel for the congressional committee, said investigators never claimed to have a direct link, only circumstantial ties.

Melanson said he does not know the identity of Ray's conspirators. But he is convinced that others helped him obtain sophisticated false identifications because Ray, who had bungled earlier attempts at crime, was incapable of it.



MARTIN LUTHER KING

Melanson talked to two men — who were never interviewed by the committee — whose identities Ray took while he fled police, including a Toronto man with a remarkable resemblance to Ray.

Blakey said his investigators were limited by Canadian law and could not interview as many people as they wished, but he defended the investigation as thorough.

Widow calls for control of handgun sales

WASHINGTON — The widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King yesterday urged Congress to "end the needless sacrifices of men, women and children" and vote to control the sale of handguns.

The call by Coretta Scott King came on the seventh anniversary of the shooting of President Reagan outside a Washington hotel.

"For too long Congress has acquiesced to the gun lobby," King said. "The only thing that will bring an end to this inaction is an aroused citizenry." King then put the first signature on a petition, sponsored by the National Coalition to Ban Handguns, that calls for handgun sale restrictions. She and Ethel Kennedy, widow of Robert F. Kennedy, are the honorary chairwomen of the coalition's petition drive.



OPPOSING THEORY: Professor Philip Melanson displays newspaper clipping supporting his belief that investigators failed to probe conspiracy in slaying of Martin Luther King. Staff photo by Jim Davis

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