

Ford Would Sift New Data In Kennedy, King Slayings

NOV 27 1975

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 26 — President Ford last night urged that "some responsible group or organization" investigate "new developments" that have arisen concerning the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Under questioning by reporters at a White House news conference, the President said he favored such an inquiry in the Kennedy case if the new developments could be "investigated without reopening the Warren Commission. . . I think some responsible group or organization should do it, but not to reopen the Warren Commission on other aspects." He said he had secured an agreement from the Warren Commission, so that a new inquiry should be conducted by "somebody other than the Warren Commission." He declined to say whether he would support a new inquiry into the assassination of Dr. King.

This is the first time that President Ford publicly acknowledged that the new developments in the Kennedy assassination might warrant investigation. Although the President had never said in the past that he opposed a reopened inquiry he had always stood by the findings of the Warren Commission.

This is an apparent reference to David W. Belin, a senior staff member on the Warren Commission, who, last Saturday, urged Congress to reopen the Warren Commission hearings to lay to rest the questions posed by the new data.

Earlier today Attorney General Edward H. Levi announced through a spokesman that he had assigned two top level Department of Justice officials to review the investigation of Dr. King's death in the light of testimony that the black leader had been a target of harassment by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A spokesman for Mr. Levi said the attorney general had instructed J. Stanley Pottinger and Richard L. Thornburgh, assistant Attorneys General, to review the file and advise him on whether the investigation should be reopened.

President Ford told reporters

Continued on Page 17, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

tonight that he also favored an effort to identify the man in the F.B.I. who had subjected Dr. King to the harassment.

The Warren Commission, to which Mr. Ford alluded, did not investigate Dr. King's death. It was set up in 1964, after the shooting of President Kennedy in Dallas in Nov. 22, 1963. It concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, a marine who had defected to the Soviet Union, had acted alone in killing the President.

Spokesmen for Mr. Levi, in referring to the move to be conducted by Dr. King's case, said "this is not to reopen a reopening of the Warren Commission. . . It is to do so in a way that the original investigation was anything less than thorough."

He said that Mr. Levi ordered the review after testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence confirmed that the F.B.I. had conducted a six-year effort to discredit Dr. King and to remove him from leadership of the civil rights movement. It was the F.B.I. that also conducted the investigation of the killing.

Dr. King, who led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the forefront of the civil rights movement, was shot to death on the balcony of a Memphis motel on April 4, 1968. The F.B.I. later identified the killer as James Earl Ray, a former convict.

Mr. Ray was apprehended after an international manhunt and pleaded guilty to the charge. He has now repudiated his confession and is seeking a new trial. Mr. Ray, who is serving a life sentence in Tennessee, had no comment on Mr. Levi's order, according to prison officials.

The Justice Department spokesman could not estimate when the review would be completed. He said that the Attorney General had set no time limit on it. He said that one lawyer in the Civil Division had characterized the investigation as "incredibly thorough."

In two days of hearings last week, the Senate intelligence committee disclosed a pattern of harassment by the F.B.I. that began in 1962 and dogged Dr. King until his death.

The bureau placed 18 wiretaps and eight room bugs on telephones or premises used by Dr. King. It had obtained authori-

ties to tap wires from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1963 on the ground that it suspected that Communist sympathizers had infiltrated the civil rights movement.

In addition to the electronic surveillance of Dr. King, testimony showed that the bureau had attempted to stop a college from giving him an honorary degree, tried to keep him from getting an audience with the Pope and even sent him a tape recording of allegedly unsavory incidents picked up by telephone taps and room bugs.

The tape was accompanied by a letter that warned Dr. King, "There is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is . . . you are done. There is but one way out for you."

Dr. King regarded this as an effort to drive him to suicide, according to statements made at the hearings.

25 Separate Incidents

James B. Adams, an associate deputy director of the F.B.I., said that the bureau had discovered 25 separate incidents of harassment of Dr. King.

Mr. Adams acknowledged in his testimony that there was "no statutory basis or justification" for the F.B.I.'s action against Dr. King.

Of the various acts of harassment, the Senate investigators found one that came within days of Dr. King's death. According to Michael Epstein, a member of the staff, when Dr. King first went to Memphis in behalf of striking garbage workers in March 1968, he stayed at a motel owned by Whites.

Bureau documents showed that the F.B.I. had suggested leaking this information to the press. There was no evidence that it did, Mr. Epstein testified, but several news organizations sent out an article saying that Dr. King stayed at the white establishment.

When he returned to Memphis in early April (he registered at the black-owned Lorraine motel, where he was killed).

The Justice Department has for some time been conducting a separate investigation to determine whether any agents violated the law in the treatment of Dr. King.

Tennessee Opposes Plea

CINCINNATI, Nov. 26 (UPI) —The State of Tennessee has urged the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit to reject Mr. Ray's effort to withdraw his confession to Dr. King's murder.

In a brief filed yesterday, Assistant State Attorney General William Haynes Jr. argued that Mr. Ray's contention that his guilty plea had resulted from constitutionally inadequate legal advice was meritless.

Mr. Ray is asking the appellate court to overturn a ruling last fall by United States District Judge Robert McRae Jr. of Memphis that the guilty plea was valid, and that Mr. Ray was not entitled to a full-scale trial.