

Secret King Probe

By JOHN BENNETT
From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — American taxpayers are about to start learning whether their two-year, \$5-million investigation has turned up any evidence to fully explain the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The House Assassinations Committee opens its first week of public hearings Monday morning amid predictions that the whole thing will prove a bust.

The 15 months of secret probing will suddenly go public on national television to painfully remind us all of a shocking American tragedy that occurred in Memphis on the night of April 4, 1968.

Skeptics, including many members of Congress, say nothing will be produced by the King investigating subcommittee, that investigators will have labored mightily, but to no avail, to unearth a conspiracy.

There are others, including Mrs. Coretta Scott King, widow of the slain civil rights leader, who said only last week she has faith something positive for America will come from the public hearings.

The hearings will be televised on public television station WKNO, Channel 10, from 8 to 11 a.m. on Wednesday and Thursday and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday. Public

radio station WKNO-FM (91.1) will broadcast the hearings from 8 to 11 a.m. Monday through Thursday and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday.

The key to the investigation is James Earl Ray, who on March 19, 1969, pleaded guilty to murder in exchange for a 99-year sentence, but objected to the state of Tennessee's "no conspiracy" theory.

Ray is scheduled to appear under heavy guard to testify on Wednesday.

Will Ray talk, investigators ask, or will his attorney, Mark Lane, pull some last-minute surprise to foil the probe?

"We can bring him here and sit him down, but if he doesn't answer questions, what are we going to do? Give him jail time?"

Ray has already given King investigators 28 hours of testimony on tape which could be distilled into 1,500 pages of typewritten testimony for review by the American public.

Is Going Public

But what investigators really want is the live testimony of Ray in the small, heavily-guarded committee room next week on Capitol Hill.

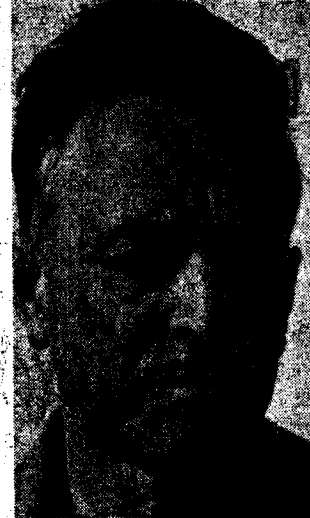
Investigators plainly want it known the public hearing is not a "trial," but a

(Continued on Page 20)

20 **** Section A The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Sunday, Aug. 13, 1978



Rep. Harold Ford



James Earl Ray

King Killing Inquiry To Get Public Airing

(Continued from Page 1)

chance for Americans to purge themselves of poisonous national doubt.

The lack of a trial for King's killer left Americans frustrated and the hearing can relieve some of this, said one investigator.

But there are others who fear the public hearings are very likely to do nothing more than simply raise more questions, cause more doubt.

It is clear that many of the committee members — including Democratic Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis — are certain a conspiracy existed in King's death, and that the FBI was involved.

Ford will ask the first questions Monday of lead-off witness Dr. Ralph Abernathy, who was with King when he was killed by a single bullet at the Lorraine Motel.

The real probe of the involvement of public agencies — including the Memphis police — is not scheduled until the second part of the hearing in November.

Ford's questioning of Abernathy is to "set the stage" of those past terrible events by drawing America back to the tumultuous events leading to King's death.

There are those who will be monitoring the hearings who are fearful that members of Congress will be too concerned with the "narrative" of the tragedy, and not give enough intelligent attention to the clues.

Among the watchdogs is the "Assassination Information Bureau" of Washington, whose views of all the recent American assassinations tend toward conspiracy.

Bureau members make some interesting points.

"We don't want to hear three hours of talk about King's life, and only 10 minutes about the gun and bullet that killed him," said one member.

They also wonder if the committee's interest in presenting a "tasteful" display of evidence won't really deprive Americans of the truth.

For example, probes won't show photo-

graphs of the King death, but only medical illustrations, because, "Crass exploitation of that kind of material would be obscene."

Mrs. King, in fact, actually approved the "taste" of the presentation of evidence.

In a briefing with the press, a key investigator said last week, "If you cover us fairly and we do our job properly, maybe the American people will have an opportunity to make up their own minds about what happened to King."

The official explanation is that King was shot dead in Memphis by Ray, acting alone. The State of Tennessee said Ray fired one shot from the second story window of a Memphis rooming house, which struck King who was standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel across the street.

Ray then raced down the stairs, dropped his rifle and other belongings to the sidewalk, ran a few yards to his white Mustang, and then drove off. That's the official explanation.

Within 24 hours, Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark announced there was "no evidence of conspiracy."

The lone assassin conclusion left millions of Americans wondering.

How did Ray acquire the money he spent? Where did he acquire the aliases and the Canadian passport he used in his flight to Europe? Why would he even think to murder Dr. King?

Dr. Abernathy, former chairman of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, will be asked to explain events surrounding and leading to King's death.

Monday's hearing will seek to explain who Dr. King really was. What did he represent? His stages of life. How did he symbolize the civil rights movement? How did he get to Memphis and finally to the Lorraine Motel?

On Tuesday come the clinical questions. How did he die? A top pathologist is expected to testify.

On Wednesday, Ray will be brought into the hearing room under very tight guard to begin the probe of who actually killed King.