

Abernathy Confers With Ray, Seeks New Trial in King Death

PETROS, Tenn. (AP) — The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, convinced a conspiracy was behind the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., says he will work for a new trial for the man convicted as the civil rights leader's lone assassin.

Abernathy, who met and questioned convicted assassin James Earl Ray for five hours Tuesday, said he will form a national committee of clergymen and civil rights leaders to investigate King's death.

"I am thoroughly convinced that James Earl Ray did not do this alone, if he was involved with it at all," Abernathy said. "I really do not feel, after my discussion today, that he knew he was cooperating in a conspiracy."

It was the first meeting between Abernathy, who succeeded King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Ray, who pleaded guilty to King's shooting death in 1969 but has since said the plea was coerced by officials, the FBI and his former attorney.

Abernathy said he asked Ray some 200 questions during their meeting behind the walls of Brushy Mountain Penitentiary, where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence. But the civil rights leader refused to specify his questions or Ray's answers.

Abernathy said he hopes to set up the committee to



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Abernathy (l) and Lane Talk to Newsmen After Visiting Ray

investigate King's 1968 slaying within three weeks.

But Abernathy said he is not dissatisfied with the work of the House Assassinations Committee, which is investigating the slayings of both King and President Kennedy.

Ray's current lawyer, Mark Lane, has accused the House

committee staff of covering up evidence favorable to Ray and not pursuing leads that might exonerate his client.

Abernathy said Ray's answers to his questions "convince me more than ever that it was a conspiracy that took the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and that James Earl Ray should get a new trial."

After Ray's marriage Friday to a Knoxville artist, Lane said he had uncovered evidence linking King's slaying in Memphis to an organized group.

Lane refused again Tuesday to name the members of the group, saying their identities would be disclosed in an affidavit seeking a new trial.