

Pierotti disputes new Prosecutor says 'same old dog and pony show'

By Lawrence Buser
The Commercial Appeal

The county's top prosecutor said Tuesday a London attorney's claims that new evidence would clear James Earl Ray in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is "the same old dog and pony show from Picadilly Circus."

Nevertheless, Dist. Atty. Gen. John Pierotti said his office is taking another look at the case and probably will talk to witnesses who defense attorneys claim have new information.

His remarks were made after Criminal Court Judge Joe B. Brown Jr. indicated to Ray's attorneys that at least some issues they were raising had been ruled on in the past.

Brown said once a guilty plea is entered voluntarily and knowingly, a defendant — even if not guilty — cannot change his mind and withdraw his plea.

The judge said the first issue to address is whether Ray pleaded guilty "in his own best interest" before defense attorneys can present what they say is new evidence that will prove his innocence.

Ray has had at least four state post-conviction hearings and a federal habeas corpus petition in which he sought to have his plea withdrawn.

"At this point, it seems those issues have been resolved by the State of Tennessee and then numerous appellate courts," Brown said.

Defense attorneys Monday filed motions seeking to free Ray

Tennessean quote Judge as saying

shoot K plea still stands
Ray claims

even if didn't .



Dr. William Pepper (left) and Wayne Chastain, attorneys for James Earl Ray, huddle as Dist. Atty. Gen. John Pierotti talks to the press after Tuesday's hearing on the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

By Michael McMillan

from the 99-year sentence he received in 1969 after pleading guilty to the assassination of King on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. They said Ray has been imprisoned illegally for the past 25 years.

Dr. William Pepper, Ray's attorney of London, said Ray entered his guilty plea without knowing facts that would have

exonerated him. He said new evidence will show Ray's "actual innocence."

Prosecutors and Ray's attorneys will argue the matters before Brown on Feb. 10.

Pepper said new evidence indicates former Memphis businessman Loyd Jowers was part of a broad conspiracy responsible for King's death, not Ray.

Jowers, 67, now living in Martin, Tenn., said on national television last month that he was paid by another Memphis businessman to hire a gunman to kill the civil rights leader.

On Monday, a small group of church and civil rights leaders called for a special prosecutor to re-examine the case.

Pierotti said Tuesday that is

not likely to happen.

He said allegations of a broad conspiracy and Jowers' involvement in the King murder were looked into and dismissed in the state's investigation more than two dozen years ago. "All of this has been litigated and I don't see anything new in this," Pierotti said. "I don't have any question that Ray was guilty."