

Courier opinion:

What does FBI have to

New evidence of FBI efforts to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and sabotage his work adds even more spice to one of the most intriguing murder mysteries of all time.

The latest batch of dirty linen, unveiled Tuesday by lawyers for the Senate Intelligence Committee, includes an anonymous letter from the FBI urging King to commit suicide; accusations of adultery based on illegal wiretapping; an attempt to recruit a Black "leader" to supplant King; and even a plan to thwart the declaration of a national holiday in honor of the late civil rights leader.

The revelations come as no shock, of course, since it had been learned previously that the late FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, feared and hated King and made him a prime target of the fascist COINTELPRO program against dissidents.

The new data, however, do more than just confirm the

paranoia of Hoover and the government and their willingness to use their enormous power to undercut the civil rights movement. What we now have is hard information that important people in government wanted King dead.

With this in mind, people who care about justice and civil liberties should watch the James Earl Ray case with renewed interest. Now serving a life sentence after pleading guilty to the 1968 slaying of King, Ray maintains that he did not commit the crime and that he copped out under coercion by the authorities and by his own defense attorney. Ray has hinted that he was a peripheral part of a conspiracy by someone to eliminate the enormously popular Black leader.

Hard at work on Ray's appeal are two experts on the King assassination -- Atty. James Lesar and author-investigator

hide in MLK death?

Harold Weisberg. Wielding massive documentation, they contend that the FBI and Tennessee authorities, in collusion with Ray's former attorney, clumsily covered up important evidence favorable to Ray and put him behind bars without being able to tie him to the murder.

Unlike that posse of mercenary conspiracy theorists who regale college students with unsubstantiated scenarios about the involvement of the government and organized crime in the political murders of the 1960s, Lesar and Weisberg offer no pat answer to the question of who killed King. They do insist that Ray did not do it, could not have done it, and was railroaded into prison by people who must be pressured to identify the real perpetrators.

A new trial for Ray, they hope, will generate this pressure. While he asserts that there is no hard evidence that the

federal government was involved in the murder of Dr. King, Weisberg does acknowledge that the crime benefitted an establishment that was frightened to death of the prospect of fundamental social change. He also notes that he has had to sue to force the bureau to release material necessary to the preparation of the appeal.

"The FBI never did anything about racism in the South until they were forced to, and even then they did it reluctantly," says Weisberg. "And King said this. Of course Hoover hated him."

How much did Hoover, and others in power, hate Dr. King and Dr. King's cause? Enough to do more than solicit a suicide? A new trial for James Earl Ray, something which the FBI has been fighting tooth and nail, might pop the lid on the ugliest can of worms this side of Watergate.