

Knoxville News-Sentinel  
Nov. 18, 1978  
Abernathy Charges Memphis  
Police, FBI, in King Death

By TOM KING  
News-Sentinel Staff Writer

The president emeritus and chairman of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference said here Friday night that the FBI, the Government and the Memphis Police Department "conspired to cut down Martin Luther King Jr."

Rev. Ralph David Abernathy was in Knoxville as keynote speaker at radio station WJBE's 10-year anniversary banquet at the Ramada Inn on Kingston Pike.

Mr. Abernathy said before the banquet that he was greatly disappointed in the work and findings of the House Assassinations Committee investigating the slaying of the late civil rights leader.

"This committee is wasting the taxpayers' money. I am convinced that there was a conspiracy and that the Memphis police had to be involved," Mr. Abernathy said. "Whoever shot Martin Luther King was aided in his escape from Memphis by the police."

Mr. Abernathy, who has spurned a Thanksgiving eve invitation from President Carter, said if the House committee does not "get to the truth of the matter," he will form a citizens' committee "that will dig for the truth. I'm not saying James Earl Ray (convicted of killing Dr. King) is innocent. But if he was involved I don't think he acted alone. There were people in high places of our Government involved, and I know of affidavits signed and sworn that J. Edgar Hoover ordered Dr. King's assassination."

Mr. Abernathy called former President Richard Nixon and former Vice President Spiro Agnew "the two most notorious criminals in America." He said both belong in jails.

Mr. Abernathy told the crowd of



Abernathy

about 300 that the power structure of America is geared to keeping the black man at certain levels.

"Don't ever believe that the white man intends to do the black man right," the civil rights leader said. "The power structure is against you and I tell you to try and become a part of the power structure of Knoxville."

Mr. Abernathy said all is not well with Knoxville, adding, "You made a mistake in inviting me to Knoxville. I will not be bought. I will not sell myself out. I've been jailed 42 times and I've been called everything but a child of God."

The civil rights leader urged President Carter to keep two promises — tax reform "to force the wealthy corporations of America like ITT, Lockheed and General Motors to shoulder their load," and to improve the quality of education for all people, regardless of race.

Mr. Abernathy said he would put nothing past the FBI. "I think the FBI would stoop to any level it needed to to destroy a man like Martin Luther King."

The civil rights leader said the more he talked with Ray at Brushy Mountain State Prison in October, the more he was convinced he was not the trigger man.

"I think he might have been involved, but I really don't think he knew what was really happening," he said. "When we were on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel when Dr. King was murdered, it was me, Andrew Young, Dr. King and, after he was shot, a fourth man appeared. I was told he could have been with the Community Relations Service out of Washington. I fear he was an infiltrator from the FBI."

Mr. Abernathy was presented a small key to Knoxville by Mayor Randy Tyree. The visitor remarked, "Knoxville has made history. I realize that times are hard and things are tough. I have gotten 300 or 400 keys from cities in the U.S. and abroad, but I have never received a key so tiny before. The mayor made it clear that I might wear it around my neck or on my wrist, but where the devil is the chain?"