

Dr. King Seemed To Expect

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WASHINGTON — The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was probably aware that he would be assassinated and underwent severe periods of depression in the months preceding his murder, the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, his chief lieutenant in the civil rights movement, has testified.

Abernathy said that, over the last four months of his life, King showed a marked change in his mental state, which seemed to indicate that he knew that he would be killed.

He said that King had been harassed constantly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and that neither the FBI nor the Justice Department had adequate security for King, although they had been told that King was constantly receiving death threats.

The charges against the FBI and the description of King's last months emerged as the key elements of Abernathy's remarks today at a public hearing of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

Under continuous questioning from the 11-member committee, Abernathy said he had no evidence to substantiate his belief that King knew that he would be killed. But he said that he was certain that King did know.

The testimony of Abernathy, which included a moving description of King's last hours, came at the start of five days of hearings on the civil rights leader's death. King was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968. James Earl Ray was later arrested and confessed to the assassination.

Since his confession, Ray has denied committing the murder. He has sought a new trial and said that he would tell the "real" story if a new trial ever was held.

Abernathy is the current head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference — the group King founded. He had

been a constant companion and friend of King since 1955 and was with King when he was fatally shot.

Today's testimony represented an attempt by several committee members to determine King's relationship with the FBI and to determine whether the agency knew about the assassination plan in advance or failed to adequately pursue leads in the case.

One committee member, Rep. Samuel L. Devine, R-Ohio, said he hoped the committee was not attempting to dwell on the FBI at the expense of pursuing other angles of the assassination.

Abernathy said that King was reluctant to report death threats to the FBI. He said that the slain civil rights leader was aware, as early as 1955, that he was a target of telephone tapping, electronic bugging and other surveillance methods.

"The FBI was aware of some of the threats," Abernathy said. "We did not report all of them, because we believed that the FBI was not interested in doing anything about them. Some of the FBI agents were from the Deep South and were quite racist.

"Just because you take a person and put a badge on him doesn't change his heart."

Abernathy said that King was aware that then FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, had called him "the most notorious liar in America."

On the day before the assassination, Abernathy said, a plane King was riding on was delayed for about an hour while it was searched. Abernathy said he had no idea who had ordered the precaution, but that no special security had been available after King's party reached Memphis, either from the FBI or from local police.

Several committee members also questioned Abernathy about a group of Memphis blacks called the "Invaders." Abernathy said they had been paid FBI

informants. He said that they had disrupted a march led by King on March 28.

King had originally gone to Memphis at the invitation of local black leaders to lead a non-violent march to aid striking city refuse collectors. The first march ended in violence, but King and other Southern Christian Leadership Conference officers returned to Memphis a week later to conduct a second march. He was killed on the return trip.

Abernathy said that King had learned on April 3, when he returned to Memphis, that the Invaders were paid FBI informants. Efforts were made, he said, to shield King from them because of concern for his safety.

"We were aware that they might impose a threat to Dr. King's safety, and that is why we insisted that he not see them," Abernathy said. "Before he died, he was aware that they were FBI informants."

The committee is apparently examining the Invaders in an attempt to determine their relationship with the FBI.

Assassination, Abernathy Says

One committee member said, for example, that some persons in the group had rented a room at the Lorraine Motel, where King had been staying.

Abernathy's most dramatic testimony dealt with his relationship with King and King's mental condition during the last four months of life. When asked how he knew that King believed he would be assassinated, Abernathy said that he had no direct knowledge, but that after January 1968 the civil rights leader seemed more concerned about his death.

"His attitude was altogether different," Abernathy said. "He seemed more troubled, more nervous and a more worried person."

At one point, he said, the two took a trip to Acapulco, Mexico, in an attempt to get King to relax. But at the time, Abernathy said, King seemed to be concerned about problems.

During that period, Abernathy said, King turned over to him more duties as vice president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference than ever before.

And King authorized the organization's bylaws to say that Abernathy should replace him in the event of his death.

"Before 1968, he wasn't talking like that," said Abernathy, who noted that the Southern Christian Leadership Con-

ference was busy at that time organizing a national "Poor People's Rally" in Washington. "But then he was a different person, and my conclusion in retrospect is that he knew he would be killed."