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Call for new Luther King rifle tests

FROM IAN BRODIE
IN WASHINGTON

A JUDGE in Memphis last night recommended tests using new technology to determine if James Earl Ray's rifle was used to assassinate Martin Luther King, the civil rights leader, 29 years ago.

The move could open the way for a new trial for Ray, who was convicted of Dr King's murder. However, the decision by Judge Joe Brown must first be reviewed by the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals.

Ray, who is terminally ill with a liver disease, confessed to shooting Dr King and then quickly recanted, even though he bought the rifle and his fingerprints were found on it. He now contends he was set up by conspirators led by a mysterious "Raoul".

Controversy has continued although courts have upheld Ray's guilty plea seven times. The difference this time is the insistence of his lawyers that electron microscope technology, invented in the 1980s, would show that another gun fired the fatal bullet.

The King family has for the first time supported a new trial. Dr King's widow, Coretta Scott King, told the court: "At least we as a nation could have the satisfaction of knowing that justice has run its course."