

# Ray Offers Guilty Plea, Paper Says

MEMPHIS — (AP) — James Earl Ray's lawyer was granted an appearance in Criminal Court Monday as an Alabama newspaper reported today that Ray plans to plead guilty in the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and will receive a 99-year sentence.

A spokesman for Judge Preston Battle, scheduled to

preside at Ray's trial next month, said Ray's lawyer had sought and been granted the hearing. There was no indication what the hearing would concern.

In Huntsville, Ala., however, the Huntsville Times reported Ray will plead guilty to the assassination of Dr. King last April 4 and receive a 99-year sentence.

The Times said it learned the State of Tennessee would recommend the 99-year sentence "when Ray pleads guilty."

Dr. King was shot to death here last April 4 as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, where he was staying after arriving to lead a demonstration in behalf of the city's 1200 garbage collectors.

The garbage workers at that time were on strike for a union contract and higher wages, issues settled soon after Dr. King's death.

District Attorney General Phil Canale had no comment on the report and State Attorney General George McCannless was not available.

Ray was captured in Lon-

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don last June 8, after a worldwide manhunt, by Scotland Yard detectives and returned after lengthy legal proceedings to face a murder charge.

### Only Way

The Huntsville newspaper quoted a source close to the case as saying the guilty plea "is the only way Ray can escape the death sentence" and win a 99-year term.

The Times said its source reported that such a sentence would have to be imposed by the jury. However, plans are for the jury to be empaneled and each juror will be asked if he would abide by the recommendation of the court.

After a prime facie case involving only a few witness-

es, the court then would accept a plea of guilty and the 99-year sentence would be recommended, the source said.

The jury would be allowed to leave the courtroom and then confirm the sentence, the source added.

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