

King's killer called patsy for 'big fish'

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ATLANTA — The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said yesterday it is convinced that James Earl Ray was just the "fall guy" for wealthy interests in King's slaying and urged that Ray be given a new trial.

The SCLC referred to Ray as a "minnow" in the case and said the new trial was needed so authorities can get to the "big fish."

Ray pleaded guilty to the murder of the civil rights leader in exchange for a 99 year prison sentence, but now contends he did so under pressure from his attorney, Percy Foreman. A federal court in Memphis is hearing Ray's charges.

In a two-page statement, SCLC said it is convinced that King was killed by a conspiracy.

"We do not question James Earl Ray's guilt or innocence," said the statement. "That to us is immaterial without other persons involved in the conspiracy being brought to trial."

It claimed that some wealthy persons who wanted King dead "paid a huge sum of money, we believe, to a few lunatics who agreed to be the patsies to carry out the crime."