

ASSASSINATIONS

James Ray reiterates his innocence

By Ron Williams

ON WEDNESDAY, AUG. 16, James Earl Ray repeated what he has maintained for the last ten years—"I did not shoot Martin Luther King Jr." This time, however, Ray made the statement under oath before the House Select Committee on Assassinations, in the presence of not only a dozen committee members but a live television audience of millions as well.

In a 38-page prepared statement and in answer to questions that followed, Ray detailed his association with the mysterious "Raoul," his activities before, during and after the murder, and asserted that the FBI and Memphis Police were involved in the killing.

(Many of the charges which emerged in the public hearings may be found in "Who Killed King?" by Mark Lane, Ray's attorney, *ITT*, Aug. 9.)

Ray testified that after escaping from the Missouri State Prison in 1967, he had met Raoul by chance on the Montreal docks. In return for money and a promise of travel documents, Ray said he carried items across the Canadian and Mexican borders for Raoul and that the rifle linked to the assassination was purchased for smuggling to Mexico.

According to Ray, it was on such business that he joined Raoul in Memphis, and took a room in the boarding house across from the Lorraine Motel. On April

4, at the suggestion of Raoul to "take in a movie," Ray claimed he was having a tire changed on his Ford Mustang when the shooting occurred. After hearing of the murder and that a white Mustang was being sought, Ray fled the country and was eventually apprehended in London's Heathrow Airport.

He says he was changing the tire on his Mustang when King was killed.

Ray charged investigators with bribing Charles Q. Stephens, a rooming-house witness who identified him as the person leaving the scene of the shooting. It was Stephen's sworn affidavit alone that allowed Ray to be extradited from Great Britain.

Ray also accused those agencies investigating the assassination of making threats on his family in an attempt to force a confession from him.

Discussing the confession that he later recanted, Ray stated, "It is not a difficult matter for an attorney to move his client to a guilty plea," and claimed that he was pressured to plead guilty by his own lawyers in Memphis. He told the committee that his first lawyer, Arthur Haynes, and later his second lawyer, Percy Forman, colluded with writer William Bradford Huie to obtain literary rights to the case.

Throughout the hearings, Ray implicated the FBI and Memphis Police in King's

murder. He claimed the FBI "set me up." He noted the recent disclosures of a bureau undercover agent who was one of the first people to reach King after he was shot.

"It was not I who sent [King] the note that he should kill himself; it was the FBI," Ray stated, referring to the bureau's campaign to discredit the civil rights leader.

It was revealed in Senate hearings in 1975 that J. Edgar Hoover ordered King's rooms bugged to record possible compromising situations with women. Tapes resulting from the bugging were sent to King's wife, while an anonymous note was forwarded to him suggesting suicide.

The question of government complicity in the assassination has received increasing attention. Rev. Jesse Jackson, of Operation PUSH has called on the Justice Department to reopen the King murder investigation, stating, "There's this overwhelming circumstantial evidence that Ray did not act alone."

Jackson, who was at King's side when he was shot April 4, 1968, conferred with Deputy Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti last week. Jackson proposed that the Justice Department investigation be reopened and that it support a new trial for Ray. In addition, Jackson proposed that a special prosecutor be appointed to initiate a separate investigation into the FBI's conduct in the King case. "The FBI," Jackson stated, "had the highest motive for the assassination of Dr. King."

In These Times Aug 23-29, 1978