

Abernathy Believes Ray Is Innocent

ATLANTA (UPI)—The Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy said today he believes one of his aides, the Rev. James Bevel, can prove James Earl Ray is innocent in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"I have absolute confidence in his judgment and integrity," Abernathy said of Bevel, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leader who offered to defend Ray last Saturday.

"If a conspiracy exists, and I believe it does, it must be fully exposed," Abernathy said. "I call upon America's oppressed and victimized to come to the aid and defense of the accused man."

Abernathy made the statement in a telegram released by the SCLC offices here. The president of the civil rights group was resting on vacation in the Virgin Islands.

Bevel, longtime staffer un-

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der King and Abernathy, is director of nonviolent education and direct action for SCLC, and presently works in the SCLC's Philadelphia office. In a telegram to Ray last Saturday, Bevel offered to defend him and said, "I know you are not guilty."

Ray's attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston, has not commented on Bevel's offer of help. Neither Foreman, who is in Memphis, nor Bevel, were available for comment today.

Bevel himself had been subpoenaed as a defense witness in the Ray trial by Ray's former attorney, Arthur J. Hanes Sr.

Hanes, in an interview after Ray fired him and hired Foreman last November, said he had planned to prove that a black power group with Communist ties killed King, with a goal of creating civil disturbance in the wake of the assassination.

A similar theory to the assassination has been offered by author William Bradford Huie, who was given inside information on the case by Ray until the switch in attorneys.