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Abernathy 170

ATLANTA, Ga. AP — The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy said today he does not believe the Rev. James Bevel has any "concrete information" to prove that James Earl Ray is either innocent or guilty in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said last week and again today that he stands behind Bevel's offer to defend Ray. But he said today he does not support Bevel's assertion that Ray is innocent.

Negro leaders in Memphis, Tenn., have information leading them to believe that other persons knew of the plan to kill King, Abernathy told a news conference.

In his earlier statement, Abernathy said Bevel, an SCLC staff member, "is trying to move nonviolence into a new dimension of American life."

Abernathy repeatedly used the word "conspiracy" in referring to King's killing. He refused to say, however, if he meant a "conscious conspiracy" involving a plot by more than one person to kill King.

He said Negro leaders in Memphis believe that persons other than Ray were aware of the plan to kill King. He cited as reasons the removal of Negro firemen and a Negro policeman from King's immediate area on the day of the assassination.

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King-Ray 220

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two associates of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., agreed Tuesday that his assassination was the result of a conspiracy rather than an unassisted act by James Earl Ray, who faces trial for the killing.

They differed, however, over what part Ray may have played in the shooting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference head in Memphis last April 4.

In Philadelphia the Rev. James L. Bevel, an SCLC director, expressed doubt that Ray had either the mental or physical competence to have carried out the assassination.

"We've allowed King to be killed under the guise of law and order and now we're going to allow Ray to be lynched under the guise of justice," Bevel asserted.

Bevel, who previously offered to act as a lawyer for Ray, —

IN HIS FORTHCOMING

FROM THE Tennessee Bar Association to practice law in the state. He told a news conference he planned a court appeal.

Later, in Atlanta, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who succeeded Dr. King as SCLC president, said he stands behind Bevel's offer to help defend Ray but does not necessarily feel that Ray was innocent of firing the fatal shot.

"I felt that Mr. Bevel was merely seeking to state what I have said, that more than one person is guilty in the death of Martin Luther King," Abernathy told an interviewer.

"I do not believe he was saying that Mr. Ray did not pull the trigger."

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