

'Not Alone In This,' Ray Quoted

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A brother of James Earl Ray said Ray told him before he pleaded guilty to the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "I am not the only one in on this," the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported today.

The brother, John Larry Ray, said he talked with Ray in his jail cell in Memphis Saturday night, two days before he entered the guilty plea. Ray then "was still trying to figure out what to do—whether to take a plea or insist on going to trial. He wanted to testify.

"MY BROTHER said there was someone else in on this 'deal,' but it had been hushed up by the Federal Bureau of Investigation," the paper quoted John Ray as saying. "I didn't press him on what he meant." Ray was sentenced to 99 years after entering his guilty plea Monday.

The Post-Dispatch interview with John Ray included these details:

John Ray said an overwhelming array of circumstantial evidence prompted Percy Foreman, Ray's attorney, to urge Ray to change his plea from innocent to guilty.

Several members of the family met with Foreman in a St. Louis suburb two weeks ago, John Ray said, and

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"Foreman told us there was just too much evidence in the hands of the prosecution.

"FOREMAN SAID he would not agree to pursue any conspiracy angle," John Ray added, "because it would make Jimmie sound like a hired killer, rather than someone who may have killed King because he thought he was a Communist or differed with his beliefs.

"Foreman warned us that

if the trial were to take place, Jimmie would possibly go to the chair to be made an example of, even though Tennessee hadn't electrocuted anyone in 10 years."

Shortly thereafter, Ray said, he received a letter from his brother indicating that he was mentally depressed.

"HE WROTE that he didn't care anymore how the case came out," John Ray said.

Ray has been quoted as wishing now he had elected to stand trial and was joined in his regrets today by the U.S. Justice Department.

A source in the department said the feeling there over Ray's abrupt guilty plea "is one of frustration." The reason: a full-fledged trial, had one been held, might have shed light on questions which have led to widespread suspicion around the country that Ray was only one figure in a conspiracy.

IN NASHVILLE, the Nashville Tennessean said in a copy-right story that Ray disclosed second thoughts about the guilty plea within hours of his sentencing in Memphis to an agreed 99 years in prison. Ray also has inquired about how he could hire a new attorney, the paper said.

The story said unidentified official sources quoted Ray as saying:

"When I went to court Monday I was convinced if I didn't plead guilty I was going to the electric chair. I wish the hell I hadn't now because with what they had on me I believe the worst I'd gotten would have been life."

UNDER TENNESSEE LAW a life prisoner could be eligible for parole after 13 years 7 months, or even earlier if he earned maximum good-behavior time. Under a 99-year sentence a prisoner must serve at least 30 years.

The Tennessean said a prison source further quoted Ray:

"My attorney and my brother told me about six weeks ago that the best thing for me to do was to plead guilty if we could work out a deal to keep me out of the chair. They told me they thought this could be done.

"I WAS THINKING about it

and every day they thought I would plead guilty. Last week I just told them if they thought this was best and what I ought to do, then I would plead guilty."

Ray was reported to have asked escorting officers during his trip from the Memphis jail to the Nashville penitentiary how he could hire another lawyer.

In Washington, Justice Department sources acknowledged the government was informed in advance that Ray would plead guilty and take 99 years.

BUT THEY DENIED the government was involved in any way with decisions leading up to the sudden move by Ray and his lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston.

At Monday's court hearing there was this exchange between the judge and Ray after the plea of guilty:

Q. Has your lawyer explained all your rights to you? Do you understand these?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. IS THIS WHAT you want to do?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. Do you understand that a plea of guilty means that you waive your right to appeal the conviction, or to appeal any pretrial rulings which may have gone against you? Do you understand this?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Has anything else been promised to you besides the 99-year sentence to induce you to plead guilty?

A. No.

Q. HAS ANY PRESSURE been put on you to induce you to enter a plea of guilty?

A. No.

The only federal action pending against Ray is an FBI charge issued in Birmingham, Ala., April 17, 1968, accusing him of conspiring "with a man—alleged to be his brother"—to violate King's civil rights in that state.

The charge was brought under an 1870 Reconstruction-era statute and conviction would have carried a maximum 10-year sentence.