

James Earl Ray Waits in Prison while the Nation Contemplates

CONSPIRACY

(In the March 21 and May 2 editions of the LA FREE PRESS Peter Dawney published reports which supported speculation that two entirely different men were identified as George Ramon Sneyd (J.E. Ray) in London and that the possibility of a conspiracy in the death of Dr. M.L. King was very real indeed. There is still an aura of suspicion and mystery surrounding the James Earl Ray affair, and the following is a further report by Mr. Dawney which should possibly shed some light on that mystery. Although the FREE PRESS does not fully subscribe to Mr. Dawney's theories, we feel that his investigation contains enough information of substance to merit close attention. — Ed.)

PETER DAWNEY

James Earl Ray was born in Alton, Illinois, a steel mill town about 30 miles northeast of St. Louis. He was a drop-out from school and he joined the army when he was 18. In 1949, he was convicted of burglary in Los Angeles and was arrested in 1950 for vagrancy. In 1951 he was charged with driving an automobile without a license, and in 1952 he collected a two-year sentence for robbing a Chicago cab driver of \$11. Later he collected another two-year sentence in Kansas for forging postal money orders. Finally, in 1959, he received a twenty year sentence for robbing a grocery store in St. Louis. It is the typical record of the small-time, unsuccessful crook. Ray was clearly a man whose standing even among criminals must have been exceedingly low.

And yet this petty thief, who appears to have been lacking both in intelligence and resource, is supposed to have murdered a leading political figure in broad daylight at a time when a large number of policemen had been especially alerted to prevent just that from happening, to have gotten clean away from the scene of the crime and to have remained at large for two months

while half the police forces of the world were hunting him. And he did this, despite the fact that he had left the murder weapon behind covered with his finger prints amongst numerous other clues pointing to his identity.

What possible motive can one attribute to such a man for such a crime? Did he believe that this would make him a hero among the segregationists of the South? Did he not comprehend that he would be a hunted man for the rest of his life? Did he not know that Ray, the assassin, would be searched for with far greater diligence than Ray, the escaped convict? One has only to ask these questions, to realize that Ray's level of intelligence must have been remarkably low.

But is there not some other solution to this problem? Is it not possible that Ray was, in fact, only marginally involved in the killing of King, that he was merely a dupe who was made into an unwitting decoy or fall-guy? Was there not perhaps a large scale conspiracy into which Ray was drawn with the intention of using him in order to conceal the very existence of the conspiracy from the public?

Although one is tempted to say, "Yes, obviously, that must be the case," such an answer does not dispose of every problem. For other questions immediately arise. If Ray did not shoot King, why did he plead guilty of his own free will? And why should the conspirators have imagined that he could be induced to do so or have felt secure from exposure? They must have realized that in prison, Ray would quite probably be willing to talk, particularly if he were offered the opportunity to turn states' evidence.

If one is to accept Ray as a fall-guy, then one has to accept that both the judge and his own defense counsel were doing the bidding of the conspirators. Although that may not seem too far fetched, the fact is that Ray fired an attorney who was prepared to defend him, on the eve

of his trial, and then hired another one who now claims that he did not pressure Ray into pleading guilty. The defense which the first attorney had prepared was based precisely on the premise that Ray was a dupe and a fall-guy. If this really were the case, what did Ray have to complain about? And why did he wait until thirty-six hours before the trial began to fire this attorney?

In order to find a possible solution to this problem, we must go back to the first week of June, 1968, in fact the last week which Ray spent at liberty. During that week there were in London two men using the same alias, Ramon George Sneyd. One stayed at the New Earls Court Hotel from the 28th May until the 5th of June. He was about 5' 9" tall, was of average build and wore glasses with thick plastic rims. He seemed to be in good health, to be aged between 30 and 35, and his hair was not crew-cut. He did not have sunken cheeks or look ill. He had a southern American accent. He did not have a cleft in his chin.

He did not spend much time in his room during the day and always handed in his key when he went out. He usually came in for the night soon after dinner, at about 9:30 p.m.

He was exceptionally shy and nervous, and conversation with him was almost painful. The receptionist, who was quite a pretty young thing, felt quite sure that he would not have had the courage to ask her out. She felt sorry for him in a way, and once spent an hour going through a leaflet on English currency with him. But he seemed to her to be unusually unintelligent and unable to take it in. The receptionist identifies him positively as the man whose photograph was issued by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police soon after the arrest.

When he left, he took a cab to the air terminal to leave his bag and announced his intention of catching a plane that night. It is almost certain that he flew to Lisbon and flew back again three days later to find two senior police officers waiting for him on arrival.

The day after the arrest, the receptionist received a call from the police in the early part of the morning. The officer wanted to know if the New Earls Court Hotel had issued a deposit re-

ceipt with a certain number. She verified that it had and said that it was in the name of Sneyd. Had the man stayed at the hotel, the officer asked. Yes, said the receptionist. "You have probably seen about the arrest in today's

papers. Is that name not familiar to you?" enquired the officer. Indeed, every paper that morning had the story of how a man called Sneyd arriving from Lisbon had been arrested.

On the day that this Sneyd left the New Earls Court, another man had checked in at the Pax Hotel. Although he was also called Ramon George Sneyd, he was not only quite different in appearance to the first man, but also differed in manner and behavior. He was between 5' 11" and 6' 1", and was very lightly built and slender. He had a sort of crew-cut and there were very tight curls in his dark brown hair. He was sun-tanned and wore horn-rimmed spectacles, was aged somewhere between 30 and 40,

and was deeply suntanned. He had a cleft in his chin, he looked ill and drawn and his cheeks were sunken. His accent was Canadian.

The Pax is a small hotel, run by Mrs. Thomas who owns it. It was she who opened the door to him, and she felt from the first that there was a mystery about him. Her first impression was that he was drunk but as there was no smell on his breath she came to the conclusion that he was under the influence of drugs. She made sure that he paid in advance.

During the next three days, Mrs. Thomas became convinced that Sneyd was severely mentally ill. He spent all day in his room only going out to buy food which he returned to eat behind a locked door. Almost every time she passed his door she noticed that it was open a crack and that he was furtively crouching behind it watching her as she went by. He complained to her constantly of violent headaches and kept asking her for aspirins. She had the impression that he did not seem to know where he was, as if he were completely dazed.

When he departed suddenly on the morning of Saturday, June 8 Mrs. Thomas could not help saying to herself: "Good riddance." After he had gone, she found a plastic syringe stuffed down the waste pipe of the washbasin in his room. In the waste paper basket, was a hypodermic needle which fitted it.

Through the window, she had seen him hail a cab in the street, and later she was told by police officers that he had gone in this cab to London Airport where he had been arrested.

One of these two Sneyds was undoubtedly James Earl Ray. The question is, Which? In fact neither

"One of the two Sneyds arrested in London was Ray. The question is, Which? In fact, neither of them resembled the photograph published in the press..."

er of them resembled the photographs of Ray which had previously been published in the Press, but the first WAS the man in the photo issued by the RCMP soon after the arrest. It was the photo supposedly used by Ray in his passport application. Add to this the fact that this was the first man to be arrested, and there is a strong supposition that he is in fact James Earl Ray. But for this, we must of course assume that the first arrest was not made by chance but had been carefully planned in advance. And we must also assume that the second arrest was accidental and not planned.

As to the identity of the second man, and the question of what became of him after his arrest, it was only possible to guess. All that was known was that both Scotland Yard and the FBI were at very great pains to conceal his arrest. This in itself provides fairly clear cut evidence of a conspiracy which the authorities did not wish the public to know about.

After the arrest, enormous precautions were taken to see that no photographs of the prisoner were published. The newspapers only carried pictures of the crowd outside the courthouse and of the police van on its way back to prison after the hearing. In court, the prisoner was surrounded by burly police officers, making it impossible for spectators in the gallery to get a good look at him. When the extradition proceedings were over, he was flown out of England in the utmost secrecy, in the dead of night, in an American Air Force plane. Was there only one prisoner on that plane, or were there two?

When Ray arrived in Memphis, there was the same secrecy and stringent security. The Press was not allowed to photograph the man but a picture taken by the Sheriff's office was released for publication. It showed a man in glasses, trussed almost like a chicken, and with head bowed. The facial features were thus not easy to distinguish, but Mrs. Thomas felt that it was not the man who had stayed at the Pax.

Arthur Hanes, Ray's attorney at the time, was putting out the suggestion that King's life had been taken as a result of a communist plot. It is possible that Hanes really believed this, but it is equally possible that it was not intended as a serious defense and that it was designed solely for the purpose of throwing people off the scent of the real, right-wing plot. Whatever it was, there seemed little doubt that the case would proceed to trial, when, with thirty-six hours to go, Ray fired Hanes and immediately retained the services of one of the most highly paid lawyers in the

United States.

The trial was then postponed for four whole months.

Arthur Hanes was not unnaturally flabbergasted by this turn of events. It was simply a subterfuge to procure a delay, he announced. But a subterfuge on whose part? Why should Ray have wanted a delay? "This is some scheme by the brothers," Hanes said. "What for, I don't know. They could not run the case with me as the lawyer. They have been working against us." And he added, "When I saw old Ray last Wednesday, I knew something was up. He was so relaxed, not even interested in talking about the trial." The scheme had evidently been hatched by the 6th of November.

So we are asked to believe that Ray's penniless brothers who inhabit the same world of petty

crooks as himself were responsible for hiring a lawyer who charges a quarter of a million dollars for a murder case. Moreover, it now appears that this lawyer showed no interest in proving Ray's innocence.

According to an AP dispatch published on the 15th of March, the deal involving Ray's plea of guilty in exchange for his life was set on foot about five weeks after Foreman took on the case. Hugh Stanton, the public defender, says that he talked with Canale, the District Attorney, about a possible guilty plea about a week before Christmas, and Canale says that he talked about it to the Department of Justice on December 19. On December 31 Canale spoke to Mrs. King's lawyer in New York to see what her reaction would be. The lawyer rang back to say that she was "opposed in fact and principle to capital punishment and would not wish to see Ray executed in the electric chair." Both Ramsey Clark and Governor Buford Ellington of Tennessee concurred in the deal. After the trial, Foreman wrote: "I saved his life in the only way it could be saved. I consider this no mean achievement."

When Ray was led from the courthouse after being sentenced, he was filmed by news cameras. In London, Mrs. Thomas saw the film on television, and she swears that it was the man who stayed at her hotel. Does this mean that the second Sneyd was switched for James Earl Ray, or does it mean that this man was the real Ray all along? Interestingly enough, an AP dispatch of November 12, the day that Foreman took over the case, said this: "Observers who had seen him at his last public appearance said his face appeared more drawn than in the past." It will be remembered that the second Sneyd's face was drawn, whereas the first's was not.

I believe that the clue to this puzzle lies in Hanes's comment on Ray's brothers quote above: "They could not run the case with me as the lawyer." Ray's brothers must have realized that Hanes was not working in the best interest of his client. They had claimed that he was nothing but a fall-guy from the moment of his indictment. It must have been clear to them that Hanes's supposed communist plot was a fake designed in part at any rate to take the wind out of their own sails. But obviously they would only have been prepared to exchange Hanes to something better.

It so happens that it was during the month of October, that I made the discovery that two Sneyds had been arrested. I have every reason to believe that Scotland Yard was aware of what I knew. During October Mrs. Thomas was visited by officers from Scotland Yard together with a man from the FBI who told her that she would be required to give evidence at the trial and that she was not to discuss the case with anybody. The FBI man insisted that she was not to say that he had been in this country and practically called her a liar when she mentioned the needle and syringe found in Sneyd's room. A sergeant from the Yard said repeatedly she was not to talk to anyone "if she knew what was good for her."

On November 6, I saw for the first time the receptionist at the New Earls Court hotel. She had moved some way out of London shortly after the arrest and had spoken to her previously by telephone. On November 10, she gave in a weeks notice at her new hotel and left seven days later. She is now untraceable.

On November 7, the subpoena was formally issued on Mrs. Thomas. The letter which accompanied it, stated: "This will inform you to disregard the date of November 12, 1968 as your appearance date in court. You will be notified at a later date as to your personal appearance in the courtroom."

At that time there was no ostensible reason to suppose that the trial would not commence on November 12, although we have seen that the scheme had obviously been hatched the day before.

Since that time Mrs. Thomas has been persistently harassed by Scotland Yard. An officer has been round to see her and has cursed and sworn at her for talking. She has been repeatedly rung up by the Yard to remind her not to talk. Her telephone has rung incessantly, but when she answers it, there is only heavy breathing on the other end.

It seems clear to me that once Scotland Yard and the FBI knew that the double arrest had been discovered and that the beans might be spilled, they realized

that it might not be possible to get away with a fake trial and a fake defense as they have done in the Sirhan case. Somehow a trial had to be avoided and the only solution they could see was to persuade Ray to plead guilty. But how was this to be done?

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One possible answer, and this must certainly have occurred to them, was to do a deal with Ray whereby he would agree to allow another man to stand trial in his name. Such a man would, of course, have to be a zombie, a drug addict for example, who could be persuaded to do anything in exchange for a daily jab. Fortunately such a man was available.

In the London TIMES of March 20, this report appeared: "Denying that Ray had trafficked in drugs, Mr. Swanson (the prison warden) said anyone on drugs would have soon been spotted. 'If a man gets high on drugs, he can't hide it for long.'" The report, however, did not make clear who had suggested that Ray was high on drugs; no one however, denies an allegation that is not made.

If the second Sneyd was substituted for Ray, then the other part of the bargain must have been that Ray would be given his freedom without much delay. No wonder Ray was so relaxed on the last time that Hanes saw him.

As for Foreman, why should he worry? He has already made \$240,000 out of marketing Ray's life story. He is generously passing on \$90,000 of that to Ray's family. Poor James, of course, won't be able to share in that, or will he?

The outline of what really occurred, is therefore not really hard to see. Hanes had to be fired because, at so late a date, a new plea obviously necessitated a new lawyer. On the other hand, the trial had to be postponed for four months since it would have looked strange if a new plea of "guilty" had been entered immediately. The idea of the new plea, however, was gradually leaked to the press at about the turn of the year, just at the time that Mrs. King was being consulted.

In the meantime, Mrs. Thomas had to be subpoenaed in order to prevent her talking, and she might have come in handy in order to convince the world that the man in the dock really was James Earl Ray. Unless something had gone wrong of course, there would have been no need to call her.

A neat arrangement was then made between Foreman and W. Bradford Huie whereby they would sell Ray's life story and Foreman would get 60 percent of the loot. And there is no need to explain how Ray's brothers were persuaded to pretend to initiate the whole scheme. They are now vigorously supporting Ray in his request for a new trial, but naturally they have to go through the motions.