

New Conspiracy Link In Dr. King's Slaying

Washington

A report of the House Committee on Assassinations says its investigators have obtained testimony that James Earl Ray received instructions from a secret conspirator during his flight after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Walter Fauntroy (Dem-District of Columbia), chairman of the subcommittee probing King's slaying, said the information came from "a very reliable source" who talked with Ray. Ray is currently serving a 99-year prison term. Fauntroy stressed that the testimony has not been corroborated.

Fauntroy said in a telephone interview yesterday that the witness testified "there was someone with whom he (Ray) was to get in touch in Portugal."

The testimony is cited in a 26-page report approved by the full 12-member committee as one of two examples of leads the panel feels must be pursued in its investigation into the assassinations of King and President John F. Kennedy.

The other example is the previously reported recollection of former CIA employees regarding the agency's surveillance of Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City less than two months before the Kennedy assassination.

The report, not yet publicly released, will be presented to the full House in January as justification for the committee's proposed one-year \$6.5-million budget.

Speaking of the new lead in the King case, Fauntroy said, "You've gone to the heart of the matter (by asking) have we corroborated this, and we have not." But he insisted, "The source is of such reliability we feel confident the lead is worth following."

Fauntroy said the report identifies the source as "a witness who had never previously been interviewed by any investigative agency." Fauntroy said the source was an American who was neither a relative nor an attorney of Ray's, but he refused to give any further identifying information.

James Lesar, who has represented Ray since 1970, said that Ray never told him about a secret meeting in Portugal.

The report described the lead as follows:

"Ray contacted another person from whom he received further

instructions . . . out of the United States."

Fauntroy confirmed that the location was Portugal, but said investigators did not know the identity of the other person nor whether the meeting actually took place.

Ray's ability to evade law enforcement authorities for two months following the April 4, 1968, slaying of King has often been cited as an indication that he had help from unknown conspirators. In particular, his ability to obtain three false passports and pay for trips to England and Portugal has been cited as beyond his intellectual or financial means.

In March, 1969, when Ray pleaded guilty to killing King, he told the court he did not agree with the statement by the prosecution and by his own defense attorney that there was no conspiracy involved. However, Ray has never explained what he meant.

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