

SFChronicle NOV 24 1976
**King Slaying
Prosecution
Questioned**

Washington

The failure to obtain a full confession from James Earl Ray in return for accepting his guilty plea in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King was "most unusual," Richard A. Sprague, chief counsel of the House Committee on Assassinations, said yesterday.

The failure is "one thing that does stand out," Sprague told reporters after reviewing details surrounding Ray's confession to the slaying in April, 1968.

"When arrangements were made for Ray to plead guilty, the law enforcement agencies never made as part of their plea bargain that there be a full interrogation or full confession by Ray," Sprague said.

This "is most unusual where somebody is pleading guilty to the murder of an individual and questions have arisen as to whether others were behind it," he added.

In Memphis, Robert K. Dwyer, one of two assistant district attorneys general assigned to prosecute Ray, questioned Sprague's statements.

"I wonder if he knows what the 'usual' thing is," Dwyer commented.

Dwyer, now a Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals judge, added that "we were going to prosecute Ray and prove beyond a reasonable doubt . . . to a moral certainty that he was guilty of killing Martin Luther King."

Sprague, who is directing the House investigation into the King murder and the slaying of President John F. Kennedy, refused to discuss his plans for questioning Ray, who is now serving a 99-year prison term.

Ray admitted killing King on March 10, 1969, as part of a bargain in which prosecutors agreed not to seek the death penalty if he would plead guilty.

But Ray told the court he did "not accept" statements by the Prosecution and his own defense attorney that there was no conspiracy in the slaying. Ray has attempted to reverse his guilty plea and gain a new trial.

Associated Press