

Abernathy Says King Knew He Would Be Killed

House Probe

Washington

Martin Luther King Jr.'s friend and successor told congressmen yesterday that he is convinced the civil rights leader's assassination was a conspiracy, and said he thinks King was told that it was coming.

"He had a premonition or maybe some knowledge," Ralph David Abernathy testified. "I think he had received some word, from sources, that he was going to be assassinated."

Abernathy gave that testimony as the House Assassinations Committee held the first public hearings in its \$5 million investigation of the murders of King and President John F. Kennedy.

Outside the hearing room, Abernathy told reporters that he believes the FBI was involved in the assassination and informed King in advance "to warn him and to threaten him both."

Abernathy said that he has no evidence to support the charge, but he believes it because of the FBI's admitted harassment and King and its efforts to disrupt his activities.

Abernathy also told reporters that he thought King's killers were helped by "people in high place." Asked if he would include the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, he said, "I wouldn't eliminate Mr. Hoover."

James Earl Ray, who pleaded

guilty to assassinating King and then recanted his confession, is to testify to the House committee beginning tomorrow.

Ray, 50, was turned over to U.S. marshals and taken by helicopter from the Brushy Mountain State Prison in eastern Tennessee yesterday, Warden Stonney Lane confirmed. A spokesman for the U.S. marshal's office would not comment on Ray's whereabouts.

Abernathy told reporters that he also thinks that Memphis police and the FBI helped Ray to get out of Memphis after the assassination on the afternoon of April 4, 1968.

But he said he would accept a conclusion that the FBI was not involved in the killing. "If they find someone else was involved, I would

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accept it," he replied.

In his testimony, Abernathy said that he is convinced the murder was a conspiracy because he believes Ray must have had help in getting to Europe after the assassination.

And he said that he believes King had been told he was going to be assassinated because King became nervous, gave instructions on his funeral sermon and gave Abernathy instructions for taking over his work.

"This is my belief," Abernathy said after repeated questions on what makes him think King was told in advance. "I can't support it. I do not know."

"I base the premise on his attitude," Abernathy said earlier. "He became altogether a different person. He was troubled. He was nervous, and he became very jittery."

"... At some points he was frightened," Abernathy said.

Abernathy said King very clearly gave him instructions for his succession as leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Abernathy recounted the assassination itself on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. He said King appealed to him wordlessly after he was shot to carry on his work.

"His mouth quivered only once," Abernathy said. "But he looked me directly in the eye. And I got a message from his eyes."

He told reporters the message was "Ralph, for God's sake, don't let me down."

Abernathy said that he was



AP Wirephoto

RALPH ABERNATHY
He testified yesterday

inside the room and heard what he thought was a firecracker until he saw King had been hit.

Abernathy testified that he had never been questioned by the Memphis police or the FBI in their investigations of the slaying, even though he was with King at the time and was "his dearest friend, his closest associate."

An FBI spokesman later said that Abernathy was questioned about the assassination by bureau agents, but said he could not give a specific date when the interview took place.

Abernathy was not asked at the hearing about his belief that the FBI was involved in the assassination and did not volunteer it.

He did say that King and his followers had come to regard the FBI and CIA "as enemies" rather than protectors.

He also said that some young black members of a group called The Invaders, who sparked violence in a Memphis sanitation strike march, had been paid FBI informers. He said young blacks admitted to King that they had caused the violence and said King's staff learned later that some of them had been FBI informants.

The Justice Department report on the FBI's investigation of King's assassination had said that a Memphis undercover policeman had infiltrated the group.

Abernathy said that he was among black leaders whom Ray has asked in letters to support his request for a new trial. He said that he will not do so unless the House investigation fails to disclose what happened.

Abernathy said Ray related in his letter that if he is granted a new trial, he will disclose evidence on where he got money for his travels after the assassination. "Mr. Ray told me he did receive money and he has enough information to blow this whole thing open," Abernathy said.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, one of several black leaders who met with Ray last week at Brushy Mountain State Prison, said Ray told them he had financed his travels after the assassination with \$1100.

Jackson quoted Ray as saying that the money was payment for what he thought was a narcotics and gun smuggling operation directed by a man named Raoul.

Ray contends that the purpose of the operation was to set him up to take the blame for King's assassination.

A.P. & U.P.