

Citizens Council Calls Tie To King Case False

By LOUIS J. ROSE
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A spokesman for the Citizens Council says a south St. Louis segregationist being investigated as a potential link in the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King neither joined nor became active in the Citizens Council until months after King's assassination in April 1968.

Gordon Baum of St. Louis, Midwest field director for the Citizens Council of America, said references to the man's ties with the Citizens Council in an article in the Post-Dispatch last Sunday tended to smear the group. The council is a race-oriented organization formed to oppose civil rights laws.

The article said investigators for the House Assassinations Committee believe that the man, an engineer, may have conveyed to a relative of James Earl Ray an offer for King's murder from John H. Sutherland, a St. Louis patent lawyer and segregationist. The investigators acknowledged that they have little hard evidence to prove such a conspiracy.

Sutherland and the engineer are dead. Ray at first pleaded guilty of King's murder, but now denies that he shot the civil rights leader.

Baum said references in the article to the engineer's ties with the Citizens Council and the 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace were unfair and inaccurate. He said the treatment was tantamount to "damning . . . by insinuation" both organizations.

He said his own inquiries had shown that the engineer did not become associated with the Citizens Council until late in 1968, months after the assassination.

"All in all, it appears that someone is intent on linking King's killing to conservatives, and failing that, to smear the

good name of responsible conservative organizations, such as the Citizens Council," Baum said.

Baum acknowledged that he had been subpoenaed to appear before the House Assassinations Committee, but said it was only to produce records relating to area membership in the Citizens Council in the mid-1960s. Other organizations in which Sutherland was involved were asked to provide similar information, Baum said he had learned.

In his case, Baum said, the subpoena was withdrawn Monday after he notified the House committee that he did not have the records it sought.

Baum sharply criticized the committee, saying it had spent almost \$6,000,000 of "taxpayers' money to no avail" in its investigation of the assassinations of King and President John F. Kennedy.

The committee "and the newspapers might better expend their efforts in learning how the assassin, without the cooperation of someone in King's own camp, would have knowledge of what motel he was staying at, the room he would step out of and the precise time," Baum said.

The committee plans to resume hearings into King's assassination in November. The panel has heard testimony from Russell G. Byers of Rock Hill that Sutherland and the late John R. Kauffmann, a stockbroker who lived in Imperial, offered him \$50,000 in 1967 to arrange for King's murder. Byers said he turned down the offer.

Sutherland was the driving force behind the formation in 1964 of the Citizens Council in St. Louis. Some members of the organization say Sutherland began dropping out of Citizens Council affairs in 1965, but House committee sources are not convinced that this was the case.