

New admissions may solve Martin Luther King murder

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Over 25 years have passed since the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968. And as every year passes, doubts grow stronger that James Earl Ray was the lone assassin. Although Ray, under pressure from his own attorney, pled guilty rather than face certain execution if convicted by a jury, he has long since recanted his confession, and has fought a long, so far unsuccessful battle to win a retrial.

But now, a quarter of a century since one of the most tragic killings in American history, five people have come forward, including a Memphis businessman who says he arranged the murder of Dr. King, and have offered to tell all they know in return for immunity from prosecution.

The central figure in this startling development is Lloyd Jowers. At the time of the King assassination, Jowers owned Jim's Bar and Grill, which abutted the Lorraine Motel where King was shot.

According to Jowers's account, which he presented to ABC News's Sam Donaldson on the broadcast "Prime Time Live" on Dec. 16, and spelled out in a videotaped deposition last June, he was approached by Memphis produce dealer Frank Liberto shortly after King arrived in Memphis to support a strike by city sanitation workers. Liberto was the brother of New Orleans mobster Salvatore Liberto, a top lieutenant to crime boss Carlos Marcello. He allegedly offered Jowers \$100,000 to hire a hitman to murder King. Jowers told ABC's Donaldson that he owed Liberto a "very big favor" and agreed to arrange the murder.

According to Jowers's account, he did hire a local semi-retarded black man, while Liberto provided a high-powered rifle for the job. Jowers was assured that neither he nor the hitman would come under suspicion because a "patsy" would be set up.

Jowers told ABC that James Earl Ray, who rented a room

in the boarding house over Jim's Bar and Grill, was that patsy.

It is here that Jowers's story converges with Ray's own version of the King assassination. Jowers claims that a mysterious figure with a Spanish accent, introduced only as "Raoul," was with Liberto when the gun was delivered for the assassination. Ray has written extensively about the same "Raoul," and has identified him as the man who provided him with money and phony passports for a number of months leading up to the day of the King assassination. Ray claims that "Raoul" was a gun smuggler who employed Ray, a career petty criminal who had escaped from prison, to run guns between Canada and the United States. Ray would make contact with "Raoul" through a motel in New Orleans owned by the Marcello mob. In his most recent account, Ray has also alleged that "Raoul" was bankrolled by a man he believes was David Graiver, a well-known swindler and associate of gangster Meyer Lansky and top New York officials of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Call for a new trial

Hosea Williams, one of the top aides to King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) at the time of the assassination, told Donaldson that he was at the Lorraine Motel the day of the killing and he was certain that the fatal shot was fired from the ground level and from a much closer distance than the boarding house where Ray allegedly was positioned.

Rev. James Bevel, another top SCLC organizer, was also at the Lorraine Motel the day King was assassinated. He has been on record since February 1969 demanding that James Earl Ray be given a fair trial. Bevel has argued for 25 years that only by providing Ray with a fair trial can the truth ever come out, and the architects of the assassination be exposed.

In a *Look* magazine article published April 15, 1969,

assistant editor George Goodman quoted Bevel telling fellow SCLC leaders: "We should not let this country give us a poor, defenseless goat in sacrifice for the body of our lamb. I don't believe Ray was capable of killing King, but whether he did or not really doesn't matter now. Ray's execution would not take us one step further in recognizing Dr. King's dream. It would furnish our enemies with a scapegoat. They could wash their hands of guilt." Bevel called upon the SCLC to fight for a fair trial for Ray.

Today, Rev. James Bevel is still in the forefront of the fight to get to the truth. He issued a call on Dec. 23, 1993 for all black leaders who are serious about justice to take a stand for a fair and impartial trial for Ray. Bevel's call was endorsed by Lyndon LaRouche, Jr., who ran for President in 1992 with Bevel as his vice presidential running mate. In a Dec. 29 statement, LaRouche told *EIR*: "The breaking of this story at this time underscores the fact that the killing of King and the failure to intercede on behalf of justice and a full investigation in the case of his alleged assassin led to a fatal weakening of the civil rights movement as it existed prior to that point. . . . This case and proper followup in pursuit of long-delayed justice must be used as a catalyst for sparking a reawakening of the population as a whole, especially among African-American males who are at the leading edge of a process of quasi-genocidal destruction in this country."

The shadow of 'Gay' Edgar Hoover

On Dec. 12, the London *Observer* devoted nearly a page to the King assassination revelations. Interviewing one of Ray's current attorneys, Dr. William Pepper, the *Observer* said Pepper is convinced that if his client wins a fair trial, evidence will eventually surface which will trace the assassination directly back to the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

A growing body of evidence supports Pepper's claims. A recent unauthorized biography of Hoover by Anthony Summers detailed Hoover's intimate ties to such mob kingpins as Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, and Carlos Marcello.

A former FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau's Chicago field office, Guy Bannister, was implicated in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The New Orleans-based Bannister was closely tied to the local crime machine, as well as to anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA, and the shadowy front company Permindex—a Montreal firm run by Louis Mortimer Bloomfield, a wartime British intelligence operator who served as liaison to Hoover and who later became an attorney for the Bronfman liquor empire. Although Bannister died before the assassination of King, New Orleans remained a hotbed of FBI-crime collusion for years after his death.

Also clinging to the FBI's dirty underbelly is the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith, which raises additional questions about the broader apparatus implicated in King's assassination. At the time of King's death, the New Orleans ADL office was headed by Adolph Botnick, a longtime friend of Guy Bannister and a close ally of the local

FBI, according to another recent book by *Los Angeles Times* Washington bureau chief Jack Nelson.

Henry Hochschild was a public relations director of the ADL in the mid-1960s. Last spring, Hochschild told *San Francisco Weekly* that he resigned from the ADL in protest over the League's spying on Dr. Martin Luther King. Hochschild discovered that the ADL, which was ostensibly collaborating with King and the SCLC in the civil rights struggle, was passing information on King's schedule, his personal habits, and his key aides to FBI Director Hoover. ADL officials, especially in the Deep South, considered King a "loose cannon" who could not be easily controlled and manipulated. They viewed him as a threat to the safety of the small but well-heeled Jewish community in places like Mississippi and Louisiana.

Two months after King's death, ADL's Botnick covertly paid two Ku Klux Klan leaders in Mississippi over \$69,000 to stage a bomb attack against the home of a prominent Jewish businessman in Meridian, Mississippi. The FBI and local police were in on the setup, and the incident resulted in a shootout in which a local schoolteacher was killed and a second Klansman shot 70 times.

Although no hard evidence links the Meridian incident to the King assassination, the two events do form part of a mosaic of FBI and ADL corruption and brutality directed against the civil rights movement. The convergence of both events on New Orleans is likely more than coincidence.

Resistance to a new probe

Buttressing Lloyd Jowers's story are four other witnesses, all of whom were privy to details of the assassination. One Memphis man, a black convicted killer, told ABC that Jowers asked him to eliminate several witnesses who could link Jowers to the King assassination. Jowers says he had indiscreetly shown the actual assassin's rifle to several bar patrons in the days following the murder of King. He also became concerned that the killer might crack and come forward with the true story.

Other witnesses have already stepped forward to accuse the FBI of running a systematic coverup of the King assassination from day one. John McFerren was in Frank Liberto's produce shop hours before the King assassination, and he overheard a phone conversation between Liberto and an unknown party, in which Liberto said: "Kill the S.O.B. My brother in New Orleans will pay you the \$5,000." McFerren went immediately to the FBI with his story, accompanied by several Tennessee civil rights activists. But FBI agent O.B. Johnson reportedly told McFerren several days later that his story didn't check out, and warned him to keep his mouth shut.

To this day, there is still systematic resistance to reopening the King assassination. Memphis District Attorney General John Pierotti told ABC that he will not grant immunity to Jowers and the other prospective witnesses. He grudgingly admitted that he will look into Jowers's allegations.