

Cover-up efforts continue

In 1969, under the threat of a certain death sentence, James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to the killing of King, in exchange for a 99-year prison sentence. Three days later, Ray recanted, and he has consistently maintained his innocence ever since. He has never had a trial.

In 1993, following a series of articles in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* reporting on U.S. Army intelligence surveillance of Dr. King in the late 1960s, Pepper began to receive detailed and specific information pointing to a joint FBI-military conspiracy to kill King, using a team of the Army's 20th Special Forces Group which was based in Alabama and Mississippi. (For more background, see the review of Pepper's book in *EIR*, Dec. 8, 1995, and the feature article in *New Federalist* newspaper, Jan. 15, 1996.)

The head of the special team had been identified to Pepper as Capt. Billy Ray Eidson, who, Pepper was told, had later died. In October 1994, Pepper had a meeting with a former military covert operative whom he calls "Carson." Carson told Pepper what Carson had been told by a member of the special team, J.D. Hill, who was murdered in 1979. Carson provided Pepper with very detailed information on precisely how the special team was trained, and what it did in Memphis on April 4, 1968. Carson said, however, that the team had not actually shot King; they were there as backup in case the designated shooter—the contract killer Raul—failed. Ray was simply set up to be the fall guy, to be caught, and probably quickly killed.

Interview: Dr. William F. Pepper

Dr. Pepper is the attorney for James Earl Ray, and author of Orders to Kill: the Truth Behind the Murder of Martin Luther King. He was interviewed by Edward Spannaus on March 31 and April 1. The following are excerpts from their discussion (some of the questions have been abridged; these are printed in italics).

EIR: Can you give me some more background on Donald Wilson and the new evidence you have?

Pepper: I've known Don Wilson for a little over a year, he came to me about a year ago. He was an FBI agent in 1967; he served with the Bureau for ten years. He was one of two agents that first visited the car in Capitol Homes project. He found in that car, in an envelope, some documentation which indicated that Raul existed. This was the first time there had ever been any indication of this, that this man existed, outside of James's allegations. He [Wilson] did not trust the Bureau to handle the evidence properly, and he retained it for 30 years.

He never had a reason to bring it forward, or an opportu-

nity to bring it forward, until recently, with James's [pending] death, and the Kings seeking a trial, and the shutting down of the case, by the media and the government. So he came forward. . . . We were always trying to save him for court, and trying to get the information into court.

All we ever wanted to do, was to get evidence before a court. And they fought us tooth and nail on that from the beginning. And now, with the firing of Judge Brown—which is what they've done, they fired this judge who wanted to get to the bottom of this—I guess we all feel that the end is near, frankly, in terms of the official activity.

So Don and I talked, and he said, "I'm willing to do what you want," so we then held a press conference in Atlanta, and the rest is history.

EIR: What is the status of the civil suit against the individual you identified as Raul?

Pepper: It is all put on hold, pending the outcome of the petition for a trial, and the setting aside of the guilty plea.

EIR: Are you still pretty confident that it's the right individual?

Pepper: I am. I know the State fights that vigorously. They say they've seen employment records, and they interviewed him in his home, and he worked for this automobile manufacturer for 30 years, and he had no holidays, and he's never been in these places. And they say all of that.

I've never seen any of that, but what I have seen—I have five witnesses who independently have identified him as a person they knew at various times and places, including James.

EIR: They identified him by a photo?

Pepper: A photograph in a spread of six.

EIR: Any comment on the FBI's reaction to Wilson's evidence?

Pepper: Their arrogance and their actions against their own self-interest never cease to amaze me. They say: "Well, agent Wilson never—we don't show any records, he was not part of the team that examined the car." They're talking about a team that examined the car in the Federal garage in Atlanta. He *wasn't*. He saw the car in Capitol Homes project. . . . The distinction is, that after Don saw the car in the projects where it was dropped, it was towed into the Federal garage, and that's where they examined it. They took it apart. He wasn't a part of that team—that's true. And they know that.

Spannaus asks about the phone number found on one of the slips of paper, the number to Jack Ruby's Vegas Club in Dallas, and whether the Vegas Club was still active in 1968.

Pepper: I don't know. That's what's very curious about this whole thing. That was a 1963 number. That's all . . . —that's what we do know.

EIR: Do you have any other indication of Ray having any contact with Jack Ruby?

Pepper: I had it, but I never published it . . . because I didn't want to get into that; I didn't want to get diverted into the Kennedy case. I knew about it, but I just didn't use it.

Spannaus asks whether Pepper had come across anything else that would point in the direction of overlaps with the Kennedy assassination.

Pepper: Two of Jack Ruby's strippers have identified Raul for me, independently. One of them said she saw Raul giving Ruby about \$30,000. . . . He was mis-counting it; it was in a Piggly-Wiggly bag.

And, of course, there's the whole Grabow thing. She saw Raul and Ruby together in Houston. . . . Ruby would visit Raul several times, in Houston.

Spannaus asks about the ABC "Turning Point" interview with Pepper, done in 1997, and recently rebroadcast, where he was ambushed by Billy Ray Eidson. Do you have any explanation for this? Were you fed bad information?

Pepper: No, there's nothing sinister about the people feeding me information. My people thought the guy was dead. They didn't know he'd been convicted of murder, and copped to manslaughter, and was sentenced to prison. And then fled to Costa Rica. None of that they knew.

EIR: Eidson was convicted of murder?

Pepper: Oh sure. He copped a plea to negligent homicide. It was a barroom brawl. He had been charged with another murder, earlier, and the witnesses didn't show up, so he got off on that one. But this one they got him, and he was convicted. And so, he just dropped out of sight. And our people—because J.D. Hill was killed, and Worley was killed, they thought he [Eidson] was killed.

EIR: How did Forrest Sawyer get a hold of him?

Pepper: The Army helped him. The Army worked hand in hand with him. What they also didn't tell you, was that I gave them a three-hour interview with a deep-cover source, who was J.D. Hill's best friend. J.D. set the operation up, he told him the whole operation. The guy in the book I call "Carson": I talked him into talking to these people. J.D. had told him everything, so he laid out what he knew, from J.D., who'd just set up the whole operation. And they didn't use one second of that on the air.

Spannaus asks Pepper about W. Hickman Ewing, the long-time Federal prosecutor in Memphis who is now Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's top deputy in the Arkansas Whitewater investigation. Ewing was the prosecutor in the televised mock trial of James Earl Ray conducted in 1993, with an active Federal judge presiding.

Pepper: Hickman was the prosecutor in the television trial.

. . . He was so down when he lost. . . . He never expected to lose. He was *down*—he was really down. In fact, we thought he might have a stroke; he just sunk in his chair. He slumped down in his chair. I said, "Hickman, are you all right?" He was confident, totally confident, that he had won.

EIR: You said in your book there was FBI surveillance at the time of that mock trial.

Pepper: Well, they reserved four rooms on the floor of the Hilton Hotel, on the same floor that the jury was. And the security at the hotel told the television security people—because those agents were coming in there that week, the same night as the jury, and they had had a technical surveillance team in the hotel for the whole week prior. They went through every room on the floor, they said. . . . They were there to see what they could do.

Spannaus tells Pepper that EIR has received reports that Ewing was involved in the cover-up of the King assassination while in the Memphis U.S. Attorney's office in the 1970s and '80s. Pepper replies that an undercover operative involved in the King assassination conspiracy, later worked for Ewing.

Pepper: The guy who was an undercover informant, a Federal operative, who was given the backup role to kill James: he worked in part for Hickman. I don't think Hickman necessarily had any knowledge of what this guy was going to do, because this guy was controlled by a couple of other people. . . . This is Jim Green. He was backing up a Memphis Police Department sergeant who was supposed to kill him [Ray] on the ground.

EIR: He worked for Ewing?

Pepper: He was an undercover operative for them, in the '70s, and Hickman prosecuted some of the cases he made.

EIR: What is James Earl Ray's condition now?

Pepper: He's critically ill, and he's going to die.

EIR: Is there still a possibility of a liver transplant, or is it too late?

Pepper: Not without money. There's a possibility, but not without money.

EIR: How much is required?

Pepper: Minimally, \$100,000 to get it started, and then \$278,000, ultimately.

EIR: Do you have anything toward that?

Pepper: No, very little. The State won't pay for it. Nobody will pay for it. He has no insurance. The VA won't pay for it, even though he's a veteran. The VA won't touch it. That money has got to be paid somehow privately. Welcome to America.

Battle breaks out in Ohio against prison privatization

by Marianna Wertz

A battle is under way in Ohio against the growing threat of prison privatization. Legislation that would privatize all new state prisons there, H.B. 590, is now pending in the legislature, and opponents fear that, should it pass, a move will then be launched to privatize the state's 29 existing prisons as well.

A demonstration against prison privatization in mid-March at the state capitol in Columbus drew an estimated 600 state employees and their supporters, whose jobs are threatened by the growth of the cheap-labor privatization companies, and who wanted to send a message that privatization is bad for everybody involved—guards, prisoners, and the state that is responsible for justice for its citizens.

What sparked the battle is the outrageous level of vio-

lence, including two recent murders and 19 assaults, at the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center (NOCC) in Youngstown, a private prison run by Corrections Corp. of America (CCA), the world's largest private prison company. Like all private prison companies, CCA pays its non-union guards so little, and trains them so inadequately, that they can't control the inmates, in this case Washington, D.C. residents, with whose lives they are entrusted.

The original contract between CCA and the Washington, D.C. prison authorities, specified that only medium-security inmates would be sent to the Youngstown prison, which is exclusively used to house D.C. inmates. That contract was never honored by CCA, and dangerous felons were mixed in with others, resulting in the explosion of violence.

A legal case was brought earlier this year on behalf of the inmates at NOCC, demanding that the original contract between CCA and Washington, D.C. prison authorities be honored, that all maximum security inmates be removed from the Youngstown facility, and that CCA reclassify its prisoners. Finally, after most of the violence was already done, a Federal judge issued an injunction to that effect in late March.

In the following interviews with *EIR*, leaders in this fight discuss why they think that it's so important to stop the spread of this evil, which is moving into every state legislature across the nation today.

Interview: Peter Wray

Mr. Wray, Communications Director, Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, Cleveland, was interviewed on March 27.

EIR: I read about your fight against prison privatization in the AFL-CIO's *Work in Progress* publication. What is the situation in Ohio in respect to private prisons, and what is the legislation you're fighting?

Wray: The situation is that Corrections Corporation of America has built and is operating a private prison in the Youngstown area, which in the main, has inmates from Washington, D.C. Also there have been moves to start privatizing the State of Ohio's prison system, which currently has 29 prisons, and there are at least nine more on the drawing boards. There's already legislation, passed in 1995, to set up an experimental state-owned, privately run prison. That will open next year in Conneaut, Ohio, which is up in the very northeast corner of the state.

There was a bill that we worked on last year, and was eventually passed this year, H.B. 293, that regulates the operations of the private prisons, and it was quite a fight to get that. At the last moment, the supporters of the private prison companies inserted an amendment, that we were not able to

defeat, which creates the second state-owned, privately run prison that's going to open in a community called Grafton, which is southeast of Cleveland.

There is another bill, H.B. 590, sponsored by Rep. Kevin Coughlin, who's out of the Akron area. His bill would require the state to privatize all the new prisons, plus any that are under construction at the time his bill is passed.

EIR: That's pending now?

Wray: That bill is pending now and there was another hearing on it on Tuesday [March 24]. Supporters of prison privatization have also said that if they get this bill through, they would like to go after the existing prisons.

EIR: The Youngstown private prison has had two murders in three weeks, and 19 stabbings in a short period of time. Was this what your demonstration was about?

Wray: It was about privatization in general.

EIR: Is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees allowed to organize the private prisons?

Wray: Right now, we can't. We are basically barred by the National Labor Relations Act from representing those people. There is a quirk in the labor law that prevents guards in the private sector from belonging to anything other than a pure guard union.