

Cover-up continues in Martin Luther King case

by Edward Spannaus

The cover-up of the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is still alive and well. Reports of recent efforts to intimidate witnesses in the assassination case, were presented at a forum held at the National Press Club in Washington on Oct. 1. These involved Justice Department harassment of the former FBI agent who recently came forward with new evidence in the case, and efforts to intimidate other witnesses last year.

However, a new initiative which could bring part of the truth out in open court was taken on Oct. 2, when the family of Martin Luther King filed a suit in Memphis, Tennessee, seeking damages from a man who says that he hired the actual killer of Dr. King. The suit names Loyd Jowers and other "unknown co-conspirators."

James Earl Ray, the man who pled guilty to the killing in 1969, and then soon recanted his guilty plea, died in prison on April 23, 1998, bringing to an end his decades-long battle to have his case re-opened and to have the trial which he never had. In the last year of Ray's life, the King family endorsed his appeal for a trial.

The Jowers suit

Jowers is the former owner of Jim's Grill, the bar and grill in Memphis near the Lorraine Motel at which Dr. King was killed. Jowers stated publicly in 1993 that James Earl Ray did not shoot Martin Luther King, but that he, Jowers, had hired a gunman, and that he had been paid \$100,000 to facilitate the assassination. Jowers also stated that he had been approached by a man named "Raul" who gave him a rifle—which was the rifle used to frame Ray.

Over time, Jowers has told more and more of his story, but he has refused to testify publicly unless he were granted immunity from prosecution, which Tennessee authorities refused to do—rather inexplicably, since they adamantly maintain the position that James Earl Ray was solely responsible for King's death.

At the Oct. 1 forum, prior to the filing of the King family lawsuit, Dr. William Pepper, who had represented Ray for a number of years, declared that he believes that Jowers is telling the truth. "Jowers has lost everything," Pepper said. "He is dying, and there is no reason for him not to tell the truth."

On Aug. 26, after meetings with Dr. King's widow, Coretta Scott King, and other members of the family, Attorney

General Janet Reno announced that the Department of Justice (DOJ) would undertake a limited review of the King assassination case. The investigation was said to be focussed on two new witnesses, Jowers, and Donald Wilson, a former FBI agent who recently disclosed new evidence related to the case.

The DOJ investigation is being run out of its Civil Rights Division, and is headed by Barry Kowalski, a career prosecutor in the Civil Rights Division, who conducted the 1993 Federal prosecution of the Los Angeles police officers who were charged with violating Rodney King's civil rights. At the insistence of the King family, the FBI is not involved in the Justice Department investigation. According to a DOJ spokesman, the Civil Rights Division is drawing upon investigators from the U.S. Marshals Service, the Postal Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF).

However, the skepticism of many observers about the Justice Department review is confirmed by the manner in which the department has treated Wilson, one of the witnesses crucial to the new investigation.

Justice Department harassment

At the Oct. 1 forum in Washington, attorney Pepper said that documents disclosed earlier this year by former FBI agent Wilson are now in the possession of the Justice Department. Pepper said that Wilson had not wanted to give the evidence up, but had wanted to have a forensic examination done first. But, Pepper said, Wilson was forced "by extraordinary tactics" to give up the evidence.

The documents included a piece of paper that had money figures on it; another, Pepper said, was a page of the Dallas, Texas telephone directory with the name "Raul" written on it, and the number of the Vegas Club in Dallas circled. The Vegas Club was owned by Jack Ruby at the time of the John F. Kennedy assassination. Pepper says that he has interviewed a number of witnesses who have placed "Raul" at Ruby's night club—which is one of a number of pieces of evidence which link the King murder to the Kennedy assassination five years earlier.

EIR subsequently spoke with Wilson, who confirmed in detail the account given by Pepper. Wilson said that Kowalski had called him, and then Kowalski and an associate flew out to Chicago to meet with Wilson. Wilson said he had decided to give the documents to Kowalski, and he took Kowalski to

his bank, where the documents were being kept in a safe-deposit box. While they were at the bank, bank officers became alarmed because someone was watching the bank; they called the police, who responded and apprehended the suspect—who turned out to be a Federal marshal, and who said that both the bank and Wilson were under surveillance.

Wilson then confronted Kowalski, who explained: “I don’t know you, I don’t know what you’re capable of.” Likewise, in the interview, most of Kowalski’s questions had to do with Wilson’s relationship with William Pepper and the King family, whether Wilson was making money from this, and if he had a movie deal with Oliver Stone—in other words, everything except the evidence.

Wilson said that since he now seemed to be the target of the investigation, he had to reconsider giving Kowalski his evidence. Kowalski later called Wilson at home and threatened to get a search warrant for the documents and to charge him with obstruction of justice. The next morning, Kowalski called Wilson’s wife, after Wilson had left for the school where he teaches; Kowalski screamed at Wilson’s wife and told her that her husband was a liar, and that he’d better hand over the documents.

An article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on Oct. 4 put it rather more mildly, reporting that “Wilson relinquished the documents to Kowalski’s lieutenants two and a half weeks ago.”

In response to comments from other panelists and questions, Pepper also described what had occurred on the ABC “Turning Point” program broadcast in June of last year. During the filming of that program, ABC had ambushed Pepper by confronting him with retired U.S. Army special forces Maj. Billy Ray Eidson, who had been identified to Pepper by ex-military sources as the head of a special team which was in Memphis as backup on the day of the King assassination, and which was prepared to shoot King if the first shooter failed. In his book *Orders to Kill*, Pepper had identified Eidson, and reported that he was dead.

Pepper told the Oct. 1 forum that he had been told that Eidson was dead. “I apologized for saying he was dead,” Pepper said, “not for what I said about him being the leader of the unit.”

ABC did not tell its audience what *EIR* has learned: that Eidson had killed two men in bar-room brawls, and that in one of those cases in 1982, he was convicted of criminally negligent homicide; in the other case, the witnesses didn’t show up, and Eidson got off. Eidson has now filed a lawsuit against Pepper and the publisher in a court in South Carolina, claiming—of all things—damage to his reputation!

Pepper also described how he had provided ABC with a “deep-cover witness,” an undercover military operative, who had been close to one of the members of the Memphis team who’d been later shot and killed. Pepper said that ABC interviewed the witness for three hours, never used a bit of the interview on the “Turning Point” show—and then the witness

started getting calls from military intelligence agencies, in an effort to silence him.

Threat to national security?

Also participating in the Washington forum were Dexter King, the son of the late Dr. King, and Rev. Walter Fauntroy, who headed the 1970s investigation of the King assassination in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Reverend Fauntroy said that the 1970s House investigation was not complete, and that he not does believe that James Earl Ray killed King, nor that Ray was acting alone, any more than he believes that Lee Harvey Oswald killed John Kennedy all by himself, or that Sirhan Sirhan killed Robert Kennedy all by himself. Fauntroy also made comparisons between those assassinations, and what is being done to President Clinton today.

Fauntroy said that it is clear to him that Ray was part of an intelligence operation, because even though Ray was a fugitive with no resources, he had access to passports, and there were people who showed up in the events surrounding the King assassination who looked just like Ray. Fauntroy surmised that, as an FBI agent, Donald Wilson understood how intelligence operations worked, and Fauntroy suggested that this is why Wilson reacted as he did and didn’t come forward with the evidence for 30 years. “I don’t doubt the veracity of Wilson,” Fauntroy declared, “and I am shocked and indignant at the treatment he is getting.”

Dexter King described how the King family had come to believe in James Earl Ray’s innocence, which, he said, was not easy for the family to come to grips with. Recounting the circumstances of Ray’s “admission” of guilt, King said that Ray had been told that he would be electrocuted if he didn’t plead guilty. Pepper added that Ray’s first lawyer, Percy Foreman, had been negotiating with the District Attorney secretly behind Ray’s back, and then Foreman told Ray he had no choice but to plead guilty; Foreman even gave Ray \$500 and told him that after he pled, he could get a new lawyer and change his plea—which of course Ray was not allowed to do.

Asked about the allegations of U.S. government involvement, Dexter King said that the decision to kill his father had to come from the top, because that is the way the military operates. But the most important question, King said, is not *how* his father was killed, but *why*. Dexter King believes that Dr. King was killed because of his public opposition to the war in Vietnam and because of his campaign for economic equality; at the time of his assassination, Dexter King said, his father was organizing the Poor People’s Movement, “a multi-racial, diversified group that was coming to Washington.” He had successfully integrated those forces from the peace movement and the civil rights movement, Dexter elaborated, “and that was a threat.”

“Some people believe that if the truth comes out, that this is a threat to national security,” Dexter added. “My hope is that the truth can come out, and that there can be reconciliation.”