

State Claims Sheridan 'Deal'

CHICAGO (AP)—A codefendant of James Hoffa, imprisoned Teamsters Union president testified Friday that a former justice department aide of Robert F. Kennedy offered him evidence of government wiretapping in exchange for his help in discrediting Jim Garrison, New Orleans district attorney.

Zachary "Red" Strate, a New Orleans builder, was called to the witness stand at the hearing ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court to determine whether illegally obtained government evidence was instrumental in the 1964 conviction of Hoffa and six others, including Strate.

Strate said he met Walter Sheridan June 13 at a New Orleans hotel. He said the meeting was arranged by Judge Malcolm O'Hara.

"Walter Sheridan offered me evidence of government bugging," Strate said. "So I could get a new trial at my hearing in Chicago, in exchange for helping to discredit Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison."

Strate quoted Sheridan as saying, "I wonder if you have the nerve to meet with me. None of Hoffa's acquaintances ever will talk to me. Why don't you let me help you in Chicago?"

Strate, who said he was the builder of Miami's plus Fontainebleau Hotel, told Judge Richard B. Austin of U.S. District Court, "We left without agreeing to anything."

"I thought the Supreme Court had given me enough information to get a new trial," Strate said.

In response to a question from Matrice Walsh, chief counsel for Hoffa, Strate said, "I gather Sheridan was working for Robert Kennedy. He said he was interested in stopping the probe of the Kennedy assassination in New Orleans."

An attorney for Sheridan, Herbert J. Miller Jr. of Washington, D.C., branded Strate's testimony about the meeting "An absolute falsehood." Miller said he was head of the justice department's criminal division at the time of the meeting.

Miller said the meeting did take place at the time and location Strate indicated, and that it was arranged by Judge O'Hara. However, he said, Strate's version of what happened "is absolutely false."

Asked why the judge sought to bring the two men together, Miller replied: "I suggest you ask Judge O'Hara about that."

"Why is a criminal judge running around setting up meetings," Miller asked rhetorically. "That's an interesting question."

Miller said he had conferred with his client after Friday's hearing, but declined to reveal Sheridan's reaction to the testimony or to give Sheridan's version of what had happened at the New Orleans meeting.

Sheridan was subpoenaed by

the defense and is scheduled to testify at Monday's hearing.

Hoffa was sentenced to five years in prison and fined \$10,000 for mail fraud and conspiracy involving loans made from Teamsters Union pension fund.