

Justice Officials, Kearney Lawyers Meet in Private

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Attorneys for the former FBI supervisor indicted in connection with illegal surveillance of radical fugitives in the early 1970s huddled yesterday with the top Justice Department officials in charge of the case.

Edward Bennett Williams and an associate who represent John J. Kearney, the accused agent, met for about an hour with Attorney General Griffin B. Bell and Benjamin R. Civiletti and Drew Days, the assistant attorney general now in charge of the continuing investigations of FBI "black bag" jobs.

Absent from the meeting were Barnett D. Skolnik, the newly appointed chief trial attorney in the Kearney case, and Paul Boucher, a criminal division attorney now investigating other potential defendants.

Boucher said he was not aware of the meeting. Skolnik was out of the city.

None of the participants would comment on the topics discussed, but the meeting raises the possibility that the two sides are considering some resolution of the Kearney case short of a trial.

Kearney was indicted last April on charges of directing illegal mail-openings and wiretaps on members of the Weather Underground in New York City.

It since has been learned that he was offered a chance to plead to a misdemeanor civil rights violation charge. He refused, however, and the felony indictment was returned.

That action triggered a storm of protest from supporters of the FBI, which is generally considered to have made Bell cautious about seeking other indictments recommended by a five-member team of civil rights division attorneys then handling the case.

The five resigned from the case in protest of Bell's approach in early December.