

Panthers' Lawyer Is Sentenced

By Ivan G. Goldman
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BALTIMORE, Feb. 14—Arthur F. Turco Jr., a white lawyer charged as an accessory in an alleged Black Panther torture slaying of a 20-year old car painter, agreed today to plead guilty to a lesser charge of simple assault and was given a suspended prison sentence.

Under terms of a plea-bargaining agreement concluded with the prosecution in the closed chambers of Judge J. Harold Grady of the Baltimore City Court, all other charges against Turco—assault with intent to murder, accessory to murder, conspiracy to murder, and soliciting to kidnap and murder—were dropped.

Judge Grady, after accepting Turco's plea in open court, sentenced him to five years in custody of the Maryland Department of Corrections, then suspended sentence and released him from active supervision.

Under Maryland law, simple (common law) assault is a misdemeanor, less serious than a felony. The crime, however, carries no statutory provision for punishment. Theoretically, conviction could carry a sentence of up to life imprisonment. Four of the five charges dropped by the prosecution

See TURCO, B5, Col. 1

Term Is Suspended For Panther Lawyer

TURCO, From B1

are punishable by the maximum penalty of death in the electric chair.

Both prosecution and defense attorneys proclaimed victory after the sentencing, although Turco, who will celebrate his 29th birthday Tuesday, continued to proclaim his innocence. He told a reporter he was "mad" that he was found guilty of any charge.

The first trial of Turco, an activist lawyer who represented the Baltimore Black Panthers, ended in a mistrial July 3, when the jury was unable to agree on a verdict.

Turco was accused of ordering the murder of Eugene Leroy Anderson in July, 1969, because, it was alleged by the prosecution, he and the Panthers believed Anderson to be a police informer. Anderson's skeleton, identified through dental records, was found in Baltimore's Leakin Park three months later. An autopsy report said his death was caused by a shotgun blast to the chest.

Turco, who had been held nine and a half months without bail in city jail pending his first trial, was released on \$10,000 bond immediately after that trial. He returned to Rochester, N.Y., where he resumed his law practice.

Assistant State's Attorney Sandra A. O'Connor, who headed the prosecution after the first trial, said she considered Turco's plea a prosecution victory.

She noted that under the terms of his sentence Turco could be brought back to Baltimore and resentenced under the assault conviction if he is found guilty of any other crime within the next five years.

"Also," she said, "We'll be forwarding records of these

proceedings to New York, with recommendations that (Turco) be considered for disbarment. I'm glad to get a conviction, and I hope he does get disbarred. It will be a service to everybody."

William M. Kunstler, one of Turco's two attorneys, said after the trial that he had called the New York Bar Association and an official assured him that there would be no automatic disbarment if Turco pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor charge.

Kunstler said the official said there would be a disbarment hearing stemming from such a conviction. If Turco were disbarred in New York it would mean he could not practice law there, and he would probably have difficulty being admitted to the bar in other states.

Two other persons, both Black Panthers, have been brought to trial in connection with Anderson's death. One was acquitted, and the other was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

After the sentencing, Mrs. O'Connor said Turco's attorneys had initiated the plea-bargaining. Kunstler did not dispute her remark.

"We just didn't know what a jury would do," Kunstler said. "This was a white man charged with ordering the death of a black man. The dynamics were too intense here."

Kunstler has maintained that Turco's prosecution was part of a nationwide conspiracy to intimidate attorneys defending Panthers and other radicals.

Kunstler himself is free under \$15,000 bond while appealing a four-year contempt citation handed down by Federal Judge Julius Hoffman in the Chicago Seven conspiracy case.