

HOFFA ASSOCIATE TESTIFIES

Deal to Discredit Garrison Said Offered by Sheridan

A New Orleans builder convicted with Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa testified that television newsman Walter Sheridan offered him evidence of government wire-tapping in return for help in discrediting District Attorney Jim Garrison's Kennedy death probe.

Zachary "Red" Strate, builder of the Fontainebleau Motor Hotel, testified in Chicago yesterday that Sheridan, a former Justice Department aide of Robert F. Kennedy, made the offer in a June 12 meeting here arranged by Criminal District Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara.

Strate was testifying at a 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.

AT THE MEETING in a New Orleans hotel, Strate said, "Walter Sheridan offered me evidence of government bugging so I could get a new trial at my hearing in Chicago, in exchange for helping to discredit District Attorney Jim Garrison."

Strate quoted Sheridan as saying, "I wonder that 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 told Federal District Judge Richard B. Austin, "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 Maurice 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."

Sheridan, who went to work for the National Broadcasting Co. after leaving the Justice Department, was primarily responsible for an hour-long program June 20 critical of Garrison's probe of the slaying of President John F. Kennedy.

Garrison has subsequently charged Sheridan with public bribery of a witness. Efforts to bring him before the Orleans Parish grand jury are tied up in federal court.

Attorney Hubert J. Miller Jr. of Washington, D.C., representing Sheridan at the Chicago hearing, was also called as a defense witness. He was until recently an assistant U.S. attorney general.

Miller branded Strate's testimony about the New Orleans meeting "an absolute falsehood."

MILLER SAID the meeting did take place at the time and place 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 DECLINED to reveal Sheridan's reaction to the testimony or give Sheridan's version of what happened at the New Orleans meeting.

Sheridan has been subpoenaed by the defense and is scheduled to testify at Monday's session of the hearing.