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Judge Bars Watergate As Vets' Legal Defense

From News Dispatches

PENNSACOLA, Fla., June 21 — A federal judge has scuttled defense efforts to link the prosecution of the antiwar activists to an alleged Nixon administration plot to divert attention from the Watergate scandal.

"The government is not on trial in this case," U.S. District Court Judge Winston Arnow told attorneys for seven members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and one supporter Wednesday. They are accused of conspiring to violently disrupt the 1972 Republican National Convention.

Speaking in stern tones, Arnow denied a series of defense motions for a hearing on allegations of government misconduct, centering on charges that the U.S. Justice Department prosecution was politically motivated.

"There has been no showing of anything but pure innuendo, speculation or conjecture about government misconduct of any kind," Arnow said. "Prosecutorial misconduct will not be an acceptable defense in this trial."

The ruling came after VVAW leader Scott Camil said the defense would be hindered if the trial was not delayed until the Watergate committee had completed its hearings.

Arnow did delay the start of the trial two weeks so he

could rule on many other defense motions.

The judge ordered the trial to start in Gainesville, Fla., July 31. It was to have begun July 17.

Today, a witness testified that a man linked to the Watergate affair had identified himself as an FBI employe and told of bugging members of the VVAW.

The testimony came from Angelica Rohan of Miami, an attorney's wife, at a pre-trial hearing. She said that Pablo Manuel Fernandez several times told her he worked for the FBI, and told her "several times" during the summer of 1972 that he had wiretapped the VVAW organization.

Another witness at the morning session was Miami police detective Rafawl Aguirre, who told of one aborted attempt of Fernandez to tape a conversation of VVAW members.

Aguirre said Fernandez arranged a meeting with VVAW members last summer in Miami and went to the meeting carrying a transmitter about the size of a cigarette pack. The detective said he waited nearby with a receiver and tape recorder, but never was able to receive any of the conversation because Fernandez apparently had gotten out of range.

Asked whether Fernandez was a paid informant, Aguirre said, "I gave him money on occasion."