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Segretti Pleads Guilty for Immunity

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Donald H. Segretti pleaded guilty yesterday to three minor counts of political sabotage under an arrangement with Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox that was quickly sealed by court order.

Segretti, 32, faces a maximum penalty of three years in prison and \$3,000 in fines for the three misdemeanors, all of them stemming from his undercover work during the 1972 Florida presidential primary campaign.

Federal District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell postponed sentencing until completion of a background interview and report by the court's probation office.

Now cooperating with government prosecutors and Senate investigators in return for immunity from further prosecution, Segretti indicated that he would set out the full extent of his espionage work before the Senate Watergate committee, which is expected to call him on Wednesday.

The boyish-faced California lawyer reportedly helped assemble a cross-country network of amateur spies and saboteurs last year on behalf of President Nixon's reelection effort.

When Judge Gesell asked whether any promises had been made that prompted Segretti to plead guilty, assistant Watergate special prosecutor Richard Davis handed the court a letter of understanding with the request that it be sealed.



Donald H. Segretti talks with newsmen after pleading guilty to three minor political sabotage charges.

Associated Press

It was the first time that Cox's office has asked that government's inducements in return for a guilty plea be kept secret. When Jeb Stuart Magruder and Fred LaBue pleaded guilty earlier this year to conspiracy in the Watergate scandal, the understandings were made a part of the court record.

In both those cases, Cox said the government would recommend that sentencing be postponed until completion of the trials of anyone implicated by their testimony.

Davis, who is in charge of Cox investigation of so-called

"dirty tricks" in last year's presidential campaign, indicated to reporters that later with Segretti's situation also were made, but he refused to indicate what they were.

Released on his own recognition, Segretti next went before Chief U.S. District Judge John J. Shrica for a two-minute hearing on requests by both Cox and the Senate Watergate committee to immunize Segretti from prosecution for any further testimony.

Shrica granted both immunity orders. He also signed immunity orders at a hearing

earlier in the day for Senate testimony by two of Segretti's alleged Florida associates, Robert M. Benz, 25, a former president of the Tampa Young Republicans, and Martin D. Kelly, 29, of Miami, a one-time state president of the College Young Republicans.

Benz was named a coconspirator in the charges against Segretti, but he was not indicted. Kelly, who reportedly received more than 50 phone calls from Segretti, also testified before the federal grand jury in Tampa that originally investigated Segretti's activities.

Segretti told Judge Gesell that he and Benz worked together in fabricating a letter on Citizens for Muskie stationery accusing Sens. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) and Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) of sexual misconduct. The letter was distributed in the Tampa area three days before the 1972 Florida presidential primary.

Hired on the recommendation of high White House aides in mid-1971, Segretti said he also conspired with Benz in the distribution of cards at a Florida rally for Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace that

Segretti pleaded guilty in connection with these incidents to two counts of illegally distributing political literature and one count of conspiracy. A fourth count against him, involving a phony letter on Citizens for Muskie stationery alleging that congressional equipment and personnel from the offices of Rep. Sam Gibbons (D-Fla.) were being used at Muskie's Tampa headquarters, was dropped.

Segretti said: "If you like Hitler, you'll love Wallace . . . Vote for Muskie."