

Ehrlichman Reported Set To Drop Wilson as Lawyer

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By SEYMOUR M. HERSH MAR 30 1974

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WASHINGTON, March 29—John D. Ehrlichman, concerned about a potential conflict of interest with H. R. Haldeman, his former White House colleague, has decided to drop John J. Wilson as his lawyer for the Watergate cover-up trials, sources close to the case disclosed today.

Mr. Ehrlichman was said to have concluded earlier this month that Mr. Wilson's joint representation of him and Mr. Haldeman "wouldn't be fair to the court and to himself," a source close to the former White House domestic adviser explained.

The identity of Mr. Ehrlichman's new attorney, who does not practice law in the Washington area, could not be immediately learned.

Mr. Wilson will continue to represent Mr. Haldeman for the foreseeable future, the sources said, but Mr. Ehrlichman's decision to go elsewhere for representation marked the end of the 72-year-old lawyer's unusual year-long role as counsel for the two highest White House aides implicated in the Watergate scandals.

Inevitably, too, the sources said, separate representation for Mr. Ehrlichman could lead to efforts by the Watergate special prosecutor's office to renew plea bargaining attempts with him. Such talks have failed in the past.

Mr. Ehrlichman could not be reached for comment. Mr. Wilson and his associate, Frank Strickler, refused to comment.

Those familiar with Mr. Ehrlichman's motives cautioned against what they termed overemphasis of the move.

"This is strictly trial strategy," one of the sources said. "You simply can't have two guys wedded in the jury's eyes in a case like this."

On 10 Charges

Mr. Ehrlichman was indicted earlier this month on a total of 10 Federal charges of conspiracy and false swearing for his alleged role in the Watergate cover-up and the burglary of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist. He is also facing trial next month in California on a state charge of perjury. He has pleaded not guilty to all of the specifications.

Mr. Haldeman, who served as Mr. Nixon's chief of staff, was indicted on five Federal counts of conspiracy and false swearing for his alleged role in the Watergate cover-up. He has also pleaded not guilty.

Both men chose Mr. Wilson,

a highly regarded Washington lawyer, to represent them last April, before they were ousted by President Nixon from their White House posts.

At that time, the White House publicly acknowledged that Mr. Wilson had met with the President to discuss the Watergate case. The suspicion has lingered among many close to the case that Mr. Wilson has continued to maintain close ties with the White House, a suggestion that he has consistently denied.

None of the sources interviewed today could, or would, explain why, if a separation of counsel was necessary, it was decided that Mr. Ehrlichman and not Mr. Haldeman would be the one to go looking for new representation.

The sources denied that there had been a rift between the men.

"It was John's own choice," one closely involved official said. "He was the one who went out looking for another lawyer."

That decision, the source said, however, was applauded by all involved "as a good move."

"The problem isn't now," this source added, "but suppose in the middle of the trial a conflict emerges? To get a new lawyer then wouldn't be fair to himself."

Mr. Ehrlichman has been reported to be wavering on a number of occasions in the last year in his determination to stand trial. Most recently early in January when he was said to be plea bargaining with attorneys representing Leon Jaworski, the special Watergate prosecutor.