

To Change Attorneys

By George Lardner Jr.
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Former White House adviser John D. Ehrlichman has decided to get a new lawyer because of a potential conflict of interest with former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman at the forthcoming Watergate cover-up trial.

Both men have been represented up to now by the same lawyer, Washington attorney John J. Wilson.

Asked about reports that he was being replaced as Ehrlichman's lawyer, Wilson said yesterday morning: "I haven't been informed of it. If this is so, I don't know it."

Wilson, who has a reputation for pursuing difficult cases with no mood for compromise, had no other comment.

Sources said, however, that the potential problems posed by Wilson's dual representation of the two prominent Watergate defendants had been under discussion for some time.

Wilson told The Washington Post last month that "the sensitivity—I'll call it that—hasn't arisen yet. But when it does, you can be sure I'll be careful." He said he did not intend to let Watergate tar a reputation of 50 years' standing.

Both Ehrlichman and Haldeman named Wilson, 72, to represent them last April before President Nixon regretfully announced their resignations as "two of the finest public servants" he had ever known.

The Watergate grand jury indicted them this month for conspiring to block the government's investigation of the 1972 break-in and bugging of Democratic national headquarters here. Ehrlichman and Haldeman each was accused of five felonies, including obstruction of justice and perjury.

In addition, Ehrlichman has been charged with five other federal offenses stemming from the 1971 White House-sponsored break-in at the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's California psychiatrist. He also faces trial in Los Angeles next month on a state charge of perjury.

There was no immediate indication who Ehrlichman's new lawyer would be. Sources said, however, that it would not be Joseph A. Ball, Ehrlich-

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man's chief West Coast lawyer, who initiated an unsuccessful round of plea-bargaining with Watergate prosecutors earlier this year.

Negotiations reached the point of a written proposal from Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, who offered to withhold all other charges against Ehrlichman in return for a guilty plea in a single count of conspiring to violate the civil rights of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis M. Felding.

Ehrlichman would have been expected in return to cooperate fully with Watergate prosecutors. He rejected the offer Feb. 21 after conferring here with Wilson and his Washington law partner, Frank H. Strickler.

There have been reports that the plea-bargaining failed because of an attempt to tie it to a similar offer for Haldeman—an offer that Watergate prosecutors were said to be unwilling to make. Both Wilson and the prosecutors have declined to comment on such reports.

Despite the switch to a new lawyer, sources doubted that Ehrlichman was about to engage in any renewed round of plea-bargaining.

"As far as I know, that isn't in the picture," one source said. "This is just playing it safe for the trial. It would be awfully awkward to wait until the trial started and then have some diverging interests develop."

Ehrlichman, who is now living in Bellevue, Wash., could not be reached for comment.

Following his hiring by Haldeman and Ehrlichman last April, Wilson met alone with Mr. Nixon at the White House several times. There have been suggestions that Wilson has since maintained close ties with the White House, but he has strenuously denied working for anyone but Haldeman and Ehrlichman.