

Coverup Charges May Be Dropped

Washington

Special prosecutor Henry S. Ruth moved yesterday to drop Watergate coverup charges against Gordon C. Strachan, once a close political aide to former White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman.

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica is almost certain to agree to the prosecutor's request to dismiss the charges. Judge Sirica scheduled a hearing for Monday.

Among other reasons for proposing suspension of prosecution of the 31-year-old lawyer, Ruth said, is that Strachan's role in the coverup had been fully disclosed in the trial of four former Nixon administration aides convicted New Year's Day.

"The trial of Strachan's co-defendants served the public interest in airing the evidence against Strachan, his co-defendants and others," Ruth said in his motion.

On February 21, Haldeman, John N. Mitchell, John D. Ehrlichman and Robert C. Mardian were sentenced to prison for taking part in the coverup conspiracy. They are appealing the conviction.

Strachan was indicted along with the other coverup defendants March 1, 1974, on charges of conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and lying to a Watergate grand jury.

Even before the indict-

ment, however, Strachan's defense lawyer, John M. Bray, had argued that the government's evidence against him was irrevocably tainted.

Last September, with the agreement of the special prosecutor, Bray won a trial for his client separate from the other coverup defendants. Bray said the government had struck a deal under which Strachan would not be prosecuted for evidence given to U.S. Attorney Earl J. Silbert in the early days of the Watergate investigation.

The government claimed that evidence was sealed and said the evidence used to indict Strachan came from other persons, like former White House counsel John W. Dean III.

In his motion, Ruth said apart from the legal reasons for dropping prosecution, the evidence in the coverup trial showed "a more limited role in the conspiracy" for Strachan than the other participants.

"On balance . . . we do not believe that the interests of justice lie in continued prosecution of Strachan," the prosecutor said.

Asked for Strachan's reaction, Bray said his client "was ecstatic." Strachan now lives in Salt Lake City, where his wife Kristine teaches law at the University of Utah.

Associated Press