

Ehrlichman's Plea Decision

Washington

John D. Ehrlichman received and turned down an offer within the last two weeks to plead guilty to a single charge in return for his cooperation with Watergate prosecutors, his attorney said yesterday.

If he entered the plea, said lawyer Frank H. Strickler, Ehrlichman was promised he could avoid more serious charges, expected shortly from one or more of the three Watergate grand juries.

Strickler said he expects President Nixon's former domestic aide, already facing trial in Los Angeles on state charges, to be indicted in more than one Watergate case.

"I imagine that as much as they can put into indictments, they will," he said.

Ehrlichman was offered an opportunity to plead guilty to a charge of violating the civil rights of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding. He was in charge of the group that broke into Fielding's office in September, 1972, searching for Ellsberg's records.

Such plea bargaining would have involved a promise to cooperate with investigators and to testify for the government at any future trials.

Ehrlichman's former assistant, Egil Krogh, accepted a similar deal, pleading guilty to the civil rights violations charge. He has begun serving a six-month prison sentence at Allenwood, Pa.

Ehrlichman is scheduled to go on trial in Los Angeles Superior Court on April 15 on state charges of burglary, conspiracy and perjury. Two other members of the White House Investigations Unit, known as the plumbers, also are scheduled for trial there.

Asked if the testimony sought from Ehrlichman included presidential involvement, Strickler said, "It's only fair to say that we know of nothing that would have satisfied a prosecutor along these lines."

Ehrlichman's California lawyers are seeking the testimony of President Nixon to support their contention that Ehrlichman was acting in the interests of national security in the Ellsberg case and that the plumbers unit had presidential sanction.

Without the President's testimony, Ehrlichman's lawyers are expected to ask dismissal of the charges on grounds they are being denied evidence available to prosecutors.

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