

4 Watergate Defendants May Offer Guilty Pleas

WASHINGTON (AP) — More guilty pleas may be brewing in the Watergate trial, according to reports, with defendants and attorneys conferring over the weekend after a mysterious closed-door court session.

It was understood that four of the defendants were feeling pressure Friday to plead guilty and avoid further trial, as did former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr.

But at least two of the defendants, G. Gordon Liddy and James W. McCord Jr., were reported holding out for a full trial that may take many weeks. It resumes Monday in open session.

No public business was conducted Friday in the trial of the six remaining persons charged in connection with the break-in and alleged bugging last June 17 of Democratic National headquarters in Washington's Watergate complex.

After government prosecutors argued peripheral motions in the U.S. Court of Appeals in the morning, U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica moved it into a surprise closed-door session in the afternoon with only the defendants, their lawyers, and a hastily summoned Spanish interpreter present.

Sirica ordered a ban on

comments by the defendants or their counsels, but reports of what might be happening filled the courthouse.

Henry B. Rothblatt, New York lawyer defending four Miami defendants was questioned about reports that the group might replace him with an attorney who would agree to enter a guilty plea.

"This could happen. An attorney can be dismissed at any time," Rothblatt replied.

But he added he was "not leaving the case. I'll be back Monday, and I may very well continue this trial."

Rothblatt is reported to oppose a guilty plea by clients, fearing it would gain them nothing and might even raise the ire of Sirica, who has said from the bench he wants to get to the bottom of the Watergate matter during the trial.

Another incident adding to the speculation came during a

morning recess when one of Rothblatt's clients was seen handing an envelope to the prosecutors.

Asked if there was a possibility of guilty pleas being offered, Rothblatt said, "Not by me."

Meanwhile, reports persisted that the Miami defendants, all with Cuban backgrounds, may plead guilty.

Newsday, a Long Island, N.Y., newspaper, reported that the four had been promised \$1,000 each for every month they spend in jail and an undisclosed lump sum when they get out of prison if they plead guilty.

The paper said sources close to the defendants identified the group promising the cash only as "friends from Miami," including, the paper said, a prominent figure in the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion.