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Pressures to Plead Guilty Alleged in Watergate Case

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 14—A source close to the Watergate case said today that four of the five defendants were under what he termed "great pressure" to plead guilty to charges of eavesdropping on the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington last June.

The source, who has provided other reliable information about the case in the past, refused to name those who were said to be putting pressure on the defendants—all of whom are from the Miami area—but he did say that a substantial promise of money had been made to the men.

In essence, the source was confirming a Time magazine report that the Watergate defendants had been promised a cash settlement as high as \$1,000 a month if they pleaded guilty and took a jail sentence. Additional funds would be paid to the men upon their release, Time said. The article did not cite the source of the information.

The New York Times source, however, said, "It's not really a question of money—just pressure."

"It is not a bribe," he added. "Just a lot of promises."

The four men—Frank A. Sturgis, Virgilio R. Gonzales, Bernard L. Barker and Eugenio Rolando Martinez—are represented by Henry R. Rothblatt, a New York lawyer.

Mr. Rothblatt refused to discuss the reports of "pressure" during a brief telephone interview today, but did acknowledge that he would withdraw from the case if the four men decided to plead guilty.

"I have repeatedly said that I will not be a party to any plea of guilty," he said.

The Watergate trial, held in United States District Court here, was recessed Friday by Chief Judge John J. Sirica until

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tomorrow amid rumors that Mr. Rothblatt and his clients were at odds over a sudden decision by the defendants to plead guilty.

Earlier last week, E. Howard Hunt, another defendant who once worked as a White House consultant, pleaded guilty.

The New York Times reported in today's issue that the four Miami defendants were continuing to be paid by sources as yet unidentified, although their funds have been sharply reduced in the last few months.

One reliable source indicated that the same group or person now paying the defendants—whom he refused to identify—may be behind the new offers of a cash payment to the men in return for a guilty plea.

The plea change itself would make little legal sense informed sources said, because it could lead to only a relatively slight difference in the possible prison sentences facing the men. Complicating the risk behind the change in plea, the source said, is Judge Sirica's reputation as a stern judge.

Mr. Rothblatt is known to be angry over the reported outside pressure on his clients and has told associates, "I don't want to be a party to anybody being pressured."

If the men decide to "cop a plea," as a source said, Judge Sirica could order Mr. Rothblatt removed from the case and provide another attorney for the men. Mr. Rothblatt is known to be prepared for that eventuality.

Another source said that the persons behind the Watergate money offers were "simply offering a lot of promises at this point."

Mr. Rothblatt is also known to have become upset at Mr. Hunt's decision to plead guilty earlier last week. Mr. Hunt's attorney later told newsmen that his client had done so because of the great stress a trial would place on his family. His wife, Dorothy, was killed in an airplane crash last month.

One source had a different view of Mr. Hunt's guilty plea, however. In discussing the current pressures on the defendants, the source said, "it all started with Hunt. He pleaded guilty—and that's the story."

There has been newspaper speculation that Mr. Hunt's plea had been made at the behest of unidentified White House or Republican party officials anxious to have little, or none, of the Watergate details aired during a court battle.

The other two defendants in the case—James W. McCord Jr. a former agent for both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency, who was arrested with the four Miami men inside the Watergate complex on June 17, and G. Gordon Liddy, a former White House and Republican re-election committee aide who is said by the prosecution to have led the intelligence operation—are apparently resisting pressures—if any have been applied to plead guilty.

It was unclear what would happen in the Watergate trial if Judge Sirica accepted the guilty pleas of the four Miami men after assigning a new lawyer to them. The attorneys for Mr. McCord and Mr. Liddy have indicated to newsmen that they would immediately move for a mistrial in that case, possibly delaying for many months the public testimony about the background and scope of the Republican operation.

If the trial does go on, with only two of the seven defendants remaining, observers indicated that it would undoubtedly not diminish the amount of information that would be developed. It was also not clear whether Earl J. Silbert, the chief assistant United States Attorney prosecuting the case, could still call the same witnesses who had been previously announced.

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