

Pressure for Watergate Guilty Pleas

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Four defendants in the Watergate bugging trial have been urged by former White House aide E. Howard Hunt Jr. to follow his lead and plead guilty, according to a source close to the defendants.

Hunt, according to the source, has led the four defendants to believe that — if they plead guilty — their families “will be taken care of” and they can expect relatively early release from prison.

The four, all from Miami — Bernard Barker, Frank Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez and Virgilio Gonzalez — are now seeking to plead guilty as a direct result of Hunt's urging and their loyalty to him, the source said.

The four and two other men, G. Gordon Liddy and James W. McCord Jr., are on trial before U.S. District

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Judge John J. Sirica. They are charged with conspiracy, wiretapping and burglary in the break-in and bugging at the Watergate Democratic National Committee headquarters June 17. The trial enters its second week today.

Some of the men have been associated with Hunt since he was a CIA agent assigned to the 1962 Bay of Pigs invasion. The Miami men served as subordinates to Hunt in the Watergate bugging, according to federal investigators.

Hunt's attorney, William O. Bittman, said Saturday that he knows of no suggestion made by his client that any of his alleged co-conspirators should change their pleas to guilty and drop from the case — as Hunt himself did on Thursday.

“I would think that the suggestion is absurd.... Can't conceive of it,” said Bittman.

REPORT

The report that the four defendants from Miami have been urged by Hunt to plead guilty follows news stories — by the New York Times, Newsday, Time magazine and syndicated columnist Jack Anderson — that the men are still being paid. While the Times and Newsday reports have described the source of the money as mystery men, Anderson reported in a column today that “most of the money for the defendants has been funneled through Hunt (who) delivered part of the cash to Bernard Barker.”

Hunt reportedly began urging the four defendants to plead guilty more than a week ago, almost immediately after the prosecution had been informed that he wished to enter a guilty plea in the case.

There was no indication that the remaining two defendants in the case — Liddy, a former White House aide and Nixon campaign official, and McCord, the former security coordinator of President Nixon's re-election committee — intend to change their pleas to guilty and drop the case.

On Friday, testimony in the Watergate trial was abruptly halted as Judge Sirica held a full day of secret conferences with the six defendants and their attorneys — amid indications that the four Miami men were seeking to change their pleas to guilty.

REPORT

The New York Times reported yesterday that the four Miami men, all with Cuban and CIA backgrounds, have been regularly paid since their arrest in the Watergate building complex.

The copyrighted story by Seymour M. Hersh said Sturgis suspects that some of the salary originated with the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Hersh wrote that federal investigators indicated any traceable connection between the defendants and the re-election committee has been severed and that any funds “long since passed into the control of those unknown men still paying the Watergate group.”

The Times article also said

that defendant Martinez was an active employee of the CIA at the time of the break-in but was fired within a day of the arrest.

It also said that Andrew St. George, a free-lance writer with connections to anti-Castro circles in Miami, has been circulating to New York publishing houses the outline of what he describes as Sturgis' experiences.

ACTIVITIES

In that outline, Hersh wrote, is the allegation that former Attorney General John N. Mitchell had been kept informed of the activities of the Watergate defendants.

Time magazine, meanwhile, reported yesterday that each of the four Miami men had been offered, in exchange for guilty pleas, cash settlements as high as \$1000 a month for each month they spent in prison, plus additional amounts at the time of release.

The magazine did not say who offered the money, nor where it had obtained the information.

The magazine also quoted Hunt as telling a Time reporter: “I'm almost certain that the Cuban community in Miami will take care of those four. The great majority of the Cuban community is convinced that what they were doing (at the Watergate) will redound to the ultimate benefit of Cuba.”