

Watergate Judge Assails Argument by Defense

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 24 — Chief Judge John J. Sirica of the United States District Court said today it would be "ridiculous" to allow a defendant in the Watergate trial to argue that he had acted under "duress."

The defendant, James W. McCord Jr., argued through his attorney, Gerald Alch of Boston, that he had been motivated by a fear of violence against Republicans planned by "radical" groups linked to the Democrats.

Mr. McCord, former security coordinator for the Committee for the Re-election of the President, is charged with conspiracy, burglary and eavesdropping in connection with a spying operation against the Democrats.

"The Republican National Committee is just another political organization," the judge said. "They don't have all the rights in the world; you know they don't have the right to hire someone to go in and bug the Democratic National Committee."

Judge Notes G.O.P. Ties

Judge Sirica, who dismissed the jury to hear Mr. Alch's argument, noted that he was a Republican who had once been active in party affairs.

"Any decent American deplores this kind of conduct," the judge said. He added that judges "are human; we have ears and we have eyes," and to allow a defense of duress "would be ridiculous, frankly."

All Mr. McCord had to do if he felt Republican officials were in danger was to call the Federal Secret Service, or the police, Judge Sirica said.

If Mr. Alch should be allowed to attempt to justify his client's conduct to the jurors on the ground he had been afraid of radicals, the judge remarked, "anybody" could seek to excuse themselves of criminal conduct in the same way.

Most of today's session dealt with routine testimony that established such things as the fact that the wiretapping equipment involved actually worked and the fact that some of the accused conspirators had traveled widely.

The court will observe tomorrow's day of mourning for President Johnson. The trial is scheduled to resume on Friday, and the judge announced today that it should conclude by the end of next week or early the following week.

Five other defendants charged in the break-in and bugging at

the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex here last June have pleaded guilty. Mr. McCord and G. Gordon Liddy, another official of the committee to re-elect the President, are on trial.