

JAWORSKI AIDES SEE PLEAS LIKELY

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Special Prosecutor Confirms
Talks With Key Figures

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 18 —

Leon Jaworski, the special Watergate prosecutor, confirmed today reports that his office had had discussions with key figures under investigation and aides of the prosecutor later indicated that those discussions could lead to plea bargaining.

The prosecutor's office insists that the statements made this morning on the National Broadcasting Company's televised "Today" show—did not mean plea bargaining was under way.

However, it is known that Mr. Jaworski has told his staff—and repeated to newsmen last week—that he hoped to have the prosecution "wrapped up" within three months. This timetable indicates a hope that he can avoid lengthy court battles.

Few observers familiar with the investigation believe such a timetable can be met without some sort of plea bargaining.

Long familiar to courthouse crowds, the term plea bargain-

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ing came into common usage in the weeks preceding former Vice President Agnew's resignation. As in that case, a person facing possible indictment and criminal charges can sometimes enter into an agreement to submit to some of the possible charges and avoid trial on others.

Negotiations involved in plea bargaining can involve agreements to furnish evidence against others under investigation in return for consideration in the case of the person facing indictment.

Rumors of plea bargaining circulated widely in Washington last week when it was learned that John D. Ehrlichman, known to be under investigation for his activities while serving as domestic adviser to President Nixon during the Watergate scandal, had visited Mr. Jaworski with his attorneys.

Following these reports, Mr. Jaworski confirmed the meetings and said discussion had

been held, but added, "No offer has been made to Mr. Ehrlichman by this office."

A spokesman for Mr. Jaworski's office turned aside questions about possible plea bargaining by specific people thought to be under investigation by saying:

"The special prosecutor refuses to comment on any specific case which might be under consideration by his office. We do not institute plea bargaining with anyone."

The subject was revived this morning after Mr. Jaworski had the following exchange with Carl Stern and Bill Monroe of N.B.C.'s "Today" show:

STERN: Are you now engaged in plea bargaining sessions with prospective in-

dictees, shall we say?
JAWORSKI: Carl, if you asked me if I have some discussions I will go that far. I'm not going to identify any individual. It wouldn't be fair.

Q. It's more than one. Is that correct?

A. I would say that it's fair to say that it's more than one, yes, sir.

AQ: Let's say that they're names that are known to you to those who have listened to you.

Staff Members Concerned

It is also known that some members of the special prosecutor's staff are concerned that if any key figures in the investigation should avoid public disclosure of the evidence by some plea bargain, the entire operation could be charged with a cover-up.

For this reason, it is believed, any decision to accept a bargained plea on the part of anyone facing indictment would be accompanied by a report such as was issued in the Agnew case. In the former Vice President's case, while he stood mute to a charge of tax evasion, the Justice Department issued a long report outlining other evidence gathered concerning his conduct in office.

Some involved in the operation believe such evidentiary disclosure would be required by the legislation that set up the special prosecutor's office.

In that legislation, under the heading "Public Reports," the special prosecutor is required, "... upon completion of his assignment [to] submit a final report to the appropriate persons or entities of the Congress."

A Shift in Position

Mr. Jaworski's television appearance today highlights an unusual week of public exposure by the Texas lawyer whose earlier activities had been tightly shielded from press and public view. Operating in extreme secrecy he has consistently refused to be interviewed or make public statements on the investigation.