

Anarchist pleads guilty to arson

By Bill Bishop, *Register Guard*, November 23, 2000

One of a pair of self-proclaimed anarchists on trial for an arson at a Eugene truck dealership last summer pleaded guilty Wednesday and was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison. In a plea bargain, 27-year-old Craig Andrew Marshall admitted he conspired to commit first-degree arson and possessed a destructive device. He may qualify for a boot camp program that could shorten his sentence to about 18 months, in addition to the five months he has spent in jail awaiting trial, according to court records.

Marshall, standing in court wearing a dark sports coat, open collar white shirt and gray slacks, quietly admitted to a judge that the prosecutor could prove he conspired to set fire to trucks at the Romania dealership on Franklin Boulevard early the morning of June 16.

He also admitted he possessed a fire bomb and that his conduct could have caused serious physical injury to someone. Marshall's plea agreement makes no mention of an attempted arson at the Tyree Oil Company in Eugene's Whiteaker neighborhood on May 27. Marshall and co-defendant Jeffrey Michael Luers, 21, were charged with nine felony crimes stemming from the two incidents. In the plea agreement, all other charges were dropped against Marshall. Luers - whose defense lawyer, Ken Morrow, died unexpectedly on Monday - still faces the nine felony charges from the two incidents. The men were in the middle of trial when it was halted this week because of Morrow's death. Luers was not involved in Wednesday's eight-minute plea and sentencing hearing. The men were arrested two days before the culmination of a series of street protests billed as "The Seven-Week Revolt" ended with dozens of arrests during the weekend of June 17-18. Demonstrators protested against a variety of issues from economic globalization to police authority.

In the plea agreement, Deputy District Attorney Caren Tracy pledged not to call Marshall as a witness in Luers' trial. Tracy also agreed not to block Marshall from applying for the state's SUMMIT boot camp program. Marshall, whose only prior conviction is for marijuana possession in California, may qualify for the intensive six-month boot camp reform program after he serves about a year in prison, defense attorney Brian Barnes said. Lane County Circuit Judge Maurice Merten gave Marshall, who also goes by the street name "Critter," a chance to speak, but Marshall declined to comment in court before sentencing.

However, Barnes said later that Marshall wanted to go through trial but feared the mandatory 7 1/2 -year Measure 11 prison term he would have received if convicted of first-degree arson. Conviction on other charges could have added even more prison time, making the risk of continuing in trial "huge," Barnes said. "He'd rather have his trial and fight it out," Barnes said. "Measure 11 makes people do things they wouldn't ordinarily do. It's coercive." Trial testimony, police and court records show police secretly followed the two men to the Romania dealership, losing sight of them for a few moments after they entered a darkened bike path adjacent to the dealership. The fire started a few minutes after the men drove away from the area, investigators testified. Tracy intended to tie the

defendants to the attempted arson at Tyree Oil Company by noting similarities in the materials used to construct the Tyree fire bomb and materials found in a storage building where the men were just before they went to the Romania dealership, according to court records. Defense lawyers were poised to show the materials were commonly available household items - thread, camp stove fuel, wooden matches, and sponges - and that other people also had access to the storage area.

The fire bomb planted at the oil company failed to ignite a fume- filled tank truck. Police contend the bomb could have done catastrophic damage and serious injury had the truck exploded where it was parked next to a storage tank full of fuel. A jury heard two days of testimony before the trial was halted. No new trial date for Luers has yet been set.