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Dane Accused in Plot to Kill Landlord Is Sentenced

By Evelyn Larrubia

Times Staff Writer

A Danish businessman accused of plotting to kill a business acquaintance was sentenced to probation Friday in a plea deal with prosecutors, who said there were evidence problems with the case.

Flemming Larsen, an owner of a candy factory in his native Denmark, pleaded guilty to solicitation of assault and attempted extortion. Charges of solicitation for murder were dropped in exchange for a sentence of five years' probation and credit for the 151 days he has served in jail. He had faced a maximum of 12 years in prison if convicted on all counts, according to his lawyer.

Authorities said Larsen, 56, owner of the defunct Danish American Farms markets in North Hills, and Simi Valley, wanted to get rid of the landlord of one of his stores.

He met with an undercover police officer posing as a hit man and had "a discussion about a number of violent acts is being done to the victims, business associates of the defendant's," Deputy Dist. Atty. Larry Diamond said. "There are legal issues as to whether or not these were preliminary discussions or reached the point of solicitation under California Law."

The extortion charges involve Larsen trying to coerce his former accountant into deeding a property to him, said Diamond, who said he thought the sentence was fair.

"Mr. Larsen and his family and I are very pleased with the disposition," defense lawyer James Blatt said. "He's pleased he has an opportunity to resolve the matter and go on with his life."

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Market owner given plea deal Prosecutors drop murder-for-hire charges; man gets probation

By Jesse Hiestand
Staff Writer

Prosecutors dropped murder-for-hire charges Friday against the former owner of two Danish American Farms markets, allowing him to plead guilty to lesser charges in a deal requiring no more jail time, attorneys said.

Flemming William Larsen smiled confidently as he left the Van Nuys courthouse with his wife, a son and several supporters.

"I'm very glad it's over," said Larsen, who had been free on \$1 million bail. "Time served and probation-that's it."

Larsen, 56, was sentenced to five years' probation and the 151 days he already spent in jail after pleading guilty to one felony count each of attempted extortion and attempted solicitation to commit assault.

The attempted extortion stemmed from a dispute between Larsen and his accountant over ownership of a Bell Canyon house, and an attempt to have former store manager Mike Simon crippled led to the assault-related charge, prosecutor said.

Larsen, who owned Danish American Farms markets in North Hills and Simi Valley, had faced up to 10 years in prison if convicted of trying to hire a hit man to kill a former business associate. Two charges of solicitation of murder were dismissed as part of the plea deal.

Proof of the plot hinged on the tape recording of a conversation in May between Larsen and an undercover Los Angeles police officer posing as a hit man.

"There were legal issues as to whether or not the conversation amounted to solicitation or were preliminary discussions," said Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney Larry Diamond.

"We took into account that no money was exchanged, and it appears the defendant did not go to that meeting expecting to meet the hit man."

Defense attorney James E. Blatt said the conversation on the surveillance tape was inconclusive.

"The language was vague throughout, and in the end it was really left in limbo as to what was going to transpire," Blatt said.

Larsen spoke briefly outside of court Friday about that conversation.

"I kind of spoke out of character for 10 to 15 minutes, and that's what got me into this," Larsen said. "It's very unfortunate."

Blatt said his investigators also turned up evidence that cast doubt on the credibility of the informant who tipped off police to the alleged plot.

The case was before Van Nuys Superior Court Judge Sandy Kriegler on Friday for trial setting.

Kriegler reduced bail to \$1 million two weeks ago before which Larsen had been held in lieu of \$3 million on prosecutors concerns that he might flee to his native Denmark, where he has business and family.

The case was followed in Denmark with fervor akin to the O.J. Simpson trial, according to Larsen's son.

Under the plea deal, Larsen will be allowed to go to Denmark for the next six months, although it is expected he will have to return at some point, Blatt said.

The sentence called for him to pay an \$8,000 fine and undergo psychological counseling.