

Capitol Punishment

Paranoid Politics

By Art Buchwald

The most damaging part of the revelations concerning the Dirty Tricks Department of the Committee for the Re-election of the President is the paranoia it has caused in the American voter. He doesn't know whom or what to believe anymore.

A chance meeting with Havelock M. Honeycomb confirmed to me the nervous state the electorate is in.

Havelock said, "I don't know whom to have faith in. You think one thing and then it turns out another thing."

"Please be more explicit," I begged.

"Okay, you were down at the Republican Convention in Miami. They had about seven or eight hundred 'Veterans Against the War.' They threw eggs at the Republicans and let air out of the tires of the delegates' buses, and shouted obscenities at Ronald Reagan. I was as horrified at their behavior as anybody. It made my American blood boil."

"Mine, too," I admitted.

"But now I read there was a secret slush fund and agents of the Committee for the Re-election of the President were sent down to the Republican Convention to cause trouble there. Suppose all the demonstrators throwing eggs at the delegates were really Republicans themselves?"

"I never thought of that," I said. "They would have more to gain throwing eggs than the Democrats."

Havelock continued, "Every time Agnew goes out to make a speech there are hecklers in the audience trying to shout him down."

"Yes," I said, "and I think that's a terrible way to treat

the Vice President of the United States."

"Yeah," said Havelock, "if they were *really* hecklers. But suppose they're on the payroll of the Committee for the Re-election of the President? Suppose they're heckling just to get sympathy for Agnew?"

"I can't believe it," I said. "Agnew would never allow paid Republican hecklers to attend his speeches."

"Suppose Agnew doesn't know they've been hired to heckle? Suppose he thinks they're legitimate?"

"I never thought of that. It makes Agnew's reactions to the hecklers so much more sincere. But it is hard to believe any political party would go to such extremes."

"Look," said Havelock, "Maurice Stans has a safe stuffed with money and he has to spend it on *something*. One of the things I read in the newspapers was that the Committee for the Re-election of the President had ordered its agents to infiltrate the McGovern staff. Suppose all the gaffes made by the McGovern people were engineered by the Republican agents?"

"Now wait a minute, Havelock. You can't tell me the Republicans were responsible for most of McGovern's goofs."

"It would explain why he's doing so badly in the polls," Havelock said.

"You're absolutely paranoid," I said. "I can see the Republicans bugging Democratic headquarters, I can see them financing demonstrations against Nixon and Agnew, and I can see them forging letters and screwing up the Democrats' schedules. But it's hard to believe that they would have put their people in high places in the McGovern campaign to make blunders in the candidate's name."

"How do we know McGovern doesn't work for *them*?" Havelock asked.

"Good God, man. 'Have you gone out of your mind?' I screamed.

"Well," Havelock said, "He is short of money.