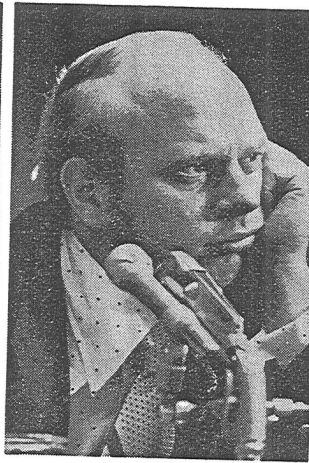
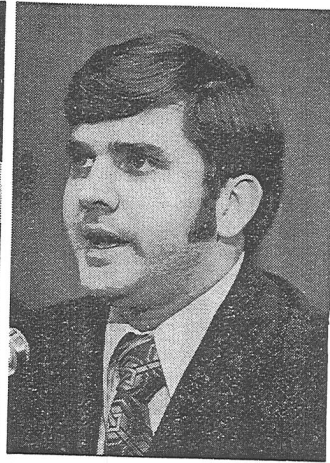




DONALD SEGRETTI



ROBERT BENZ



MARTIN KELLY

WATERGATE

Dirty, but Surely Beyond Tricks

"Can you tell me any time in the history of the U.S. that aides in the White House and the President's personal attorney made money available to people to spread lies and libels on candidates of the opposition party?"

His voice rising in anger, his eyes boring coldly into the face of a defiant witness, Senator Sam Ervin assailed the notion that White House-inspired dirty tricks employed in the 1972 presidential campaign were commonplace practices in U.S. politics. Regaining some of their lost momentum, even while losing full television coverage for the first time, Ervin's Watergate committee hearings hammered home a key point: there was a humorless, malicious quality in many of these covert activities that carried them well beyond the category of mere pranks.

The committee questioned Donald Segretti, 32, a baby-faced Los Angeles lawyer who said he had been recruited by two former White House aides, Dwight Chapin and Gordon Strachan, to carry out secret operations aimed at hindering the presidential primary campaign of Democratic Senator Edmund Muskie and sowing dissension among the leading Democratic candidates. The committee also called two of the 28 agents Segretti had enlisted to help him pursue those aims in a dozen states. The testimony of this third-rate trio of political schemers indicated that they were far from a formidable, sophisticated force. With considerable justification, Republican Senator Edward Gurney called theirs a "rinky-dink operation."

Yet Gurney, repeatedly emphasizing the limited distribution of various deceitful or defamatory letters, handbills and ads circulated by Segretti and his crew, seemed to miss the main point. While the testimony failed to show that these tactics had actually contributed much to Muskie's downfall or turned the candidates bitterly and personally against each other, this was due more

to ineptness than to a lack of intent. Moreover, Segretti testified that he reported his acts, some of which were crimes, to Chapin, his "control" at the White House. He said that Chapin, who was then Nixon's appointments secretary, generally praised him and found many of the deeds amusing.

Although many of these activities had been reported before, they drew denunciation from the Senators as they were read into the committee's record. They included the fabrication of a letter on Muskie stationery accusing Senators Hubert Humphrey and Henry Jackson of profligate sexual activity. This had received local newspaper attention during the Florida primary, leading Chapin to laud Segretti for getting \$10,000 worth of publicity for \$20. Segretti also admitted distributing a phony Humphrey press release falsely claiming that Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, another Democratic candidate, had been in a mental institution.

Other dismal acts of the Segretti team included:

► Distributing posters in Florida signed by a fictitious "Mothers Backing Muskie Committee" and reading: HELP MUSKIE IN BUSING MORE CHILDREN NOW (Committee Chief Counsel Sam Dash asked Segretti: "You were one of the mothers backing Muskie?").

► Accusing Muskie of racism through anonymous newspaper and radio ads.

► Forging the signature of a Eugene McCarthy aide on letters urging McCarthy and Chisholm supporters to switch to Humphrey.

► Sending anti-Humphrey material from nonexistent "Democrats for Peace" and "Democrats for a Liberal Alternative" organizations to spread the idea that much of the Democratic party was against Humphrey.

Segretti, who has pleaded guilty to three misdemeanor counts of distributing unauthorized campaign literature,

was completely contrite. "My activities were wrong and have no place in the American political system," he said. He was paid nearly \$45,000 by Herbert Kalmbach, Nixon's attorney, for his and some of his agents' work and expenses, he claimed.

Even more remorseful was one of Segretti's Florida agents, Martin Kelly, 24, a Miamian. More articulate and politically savvy than the other two witnesses, he declared sadly: "Any shame or abuse that can be heaped on me is certainly well deserved." Kelly did, however, relate one of the few lighthearted tricks of the campaign. He said he had offered a University of Florida coed \$20 to run naked past a hotel where Muskie was staying and to shout: "Muskie, I love you!" To his surprise, she did so. Quipped the normally solemn Senator Joseph Montoya: "You must have known the young lady quite well." Replied Kelly: "Unfortunately, no."

More Filthy. The third witness, Robert Benz, 25, of Lutz, Fla., conceded that his participation in political misdeeds was wrong, but he angered the committee by justifying it as normal. He also offered the odd excuse that his intent was to improve politics by showing Democrats, whom he accused of unspecified similar acts, that they would not escape retribution. "Do you believe that the way to clean up politics is to make it more filthy?" asked an infuriated Ervin. At one point, Benz snapped at Ervin: "Where were you in 1960 when it was accused that an election was stolen? Where were you then?" Replied Ervin: "I was right here in the U.S. and I never heard of a campaign being stolen on the credible testimony of any individual."

Still seething with some internal dissonance over the handling of White House Witness Patrick Buchanan the week before, the committee hopes to complete its dirty-tricks phase this week. Some Democratic staff members have been privately critical of Dash for calling Buchanan to testify and for what they consider his politically naive, inept questioning of Buchanan, who verbally and sometimes brilliantly mauled the committee—and got away with it.

When the committee turns later to its examination of campaign funding, one sensation is expected to turn up. TIME has learned that the staff has largely substantiated a charge by Columnist Jack Anderson that aides of the eccentric Howard Hughes gave \$100,000 in cash to Nixon's friend Bebe Rebozo in 1970 for transferral to the President. The committee staff has traced the payments to Rebozo, but has not yet been able to determine whether the cash actually reached Nixon. Deputy Presidential Press Secretary Gerald Warren claims flatly that Nixon never did receive any such funds. Some of Hughes' former associates have told investigators that the money was meant to buy influence and was not intended as a campaign contribution.