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The Self-Bugging of Mr. Ehrlichman

When Melvin R. Laird took occupancy of John D. Ehrlichman's old office on the fourth floor of the White House as domestic policy chief, he issued an abrupt and urgent order for interior redecorating: get that secret bugging equipment out of here.

Laird was amazed to find in Ehrlichman's office two concealed microphones in the ceiling and communications equipment, including tape recorders, hidden in a cabinet behind his desk. Thus, while unseen sophisticated equipment was recording all of President Nixon's conversations, Ehrlichman also could bug visitors to his office without their knowledge. Just how many Ehrlichman conversations about the Watergate scandal were taped is anybody's guess.

John Mitchell recently told the Ervin committee he suspected Ehrlichman was surreptitiously taping one conversation in Ehrlichman's office concerning Watergate. But a check of senior White House aides, past and present, produced universal ignorance that Ehrlichman had bugged his own office. Thus, while Ehrlichman apparently was not informed by chief of staff H. R. Haldeman that Mr. Nixon was secretly wired for sound, he had his own secret.

Some presidential aides view Ehrlichman's hidden microphones as markedly more sinister than Mr. Nixon's. They believe the Oval Office bugging stemmed from the same Haldeman mania for historical documentation that made him a home movie camera fanatic. Moreover, the presidential tapes were kept under lock and key by the Secret Service. In contrast, Ehrlichman controlled his own tapes, whose purpose may well have been much more immediate than helping future historians.

In a surprising show of deep-south political muscle, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy ran a mere 2 percentage points behind Vice President Spiro T. Agnew when pollster Oliver Quayle matched them head-to-head in Alabama shortly before Kennedy's Decatur, Ala., speech July 4.

Kennedy trailed Agnew 45 per cent to 42 per cent, with 13 per cent not sure. With the undecided distributed, Agnew's margin over Kennedy came down to 51 per cent to 49 per cent.

Still more surprising is the fact that Kennedy, a name that has been anathema to the Southern Democracy since

the civil rights battles of the 1960s, ran 6 points ahead of Agnew among Alabama Democrats alone.

What makes this all the more impressive is the timing of the poll. Coming before the Decatur speech, it probably did not reflect momentary pro-Kennedy sentiment resulting from his panegyric to Alabama's popular Gov. George Wallace.

The embattled milk lobby, having lavishly contributed to President Nixon's re-election, is covering its bets during the Watergate mood of Washington by giving to the Democratic National Committee.

The Special Political Agricultural Community Education (SPACE) committee, one of four dairy industry groups dispensing campaign money, gave \$10,000 to the Democratic National Committee May 25—the largest single contribution received by the committee for the March-April-May reporting period. SPACE, a political spin-off of Dairymen Inc., of Louisville, Ky., gave nothing to the Republican National Committee for the same period.

That's in sharp contrast to 1972. The milk lobby contributed heavily to President Nixon's re-election campaign in

what consumer groups now charge was a payoff for higher milk supports. SPACE alone gave the Nixon campaign \$60,000 in 1971 and \$50,000 in 1972. Its contributions to Sen. George McGovern: zero.

Why the milk lobby is turning to the Democrats is not explained. Officials for Dairymen, Inc., would not return our calls. A spokesman for the Democratic National Committee's finance division, Eric Jaffe, claimed unconvincingly he was not aware of SPACE's connection with the dairy industry.

The Watergate mood may also be partially reflected by a contribution to the Democratic National Committee from a corporate officer of International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. (ITT), which is under investigation for 1972 pro-Nixon political activities.

Edward J. Gerrity, ITT's vice president for public relations, contributed \$5,000 April 25—matching the largest individual Democratic contribution for the reporting period.

Gerrity told us he is a registered New York Democrat who has generally contributed to the Democrats over the past decade. However, the only 1972 political contribution listed for Gerrity is \$1,000 to President Nixon's re-election campaign.