

Richard Tuck

Corrupting The Political Prank

*pat
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The gang from "CREEP" has finally come up with a rebuttal. Herb Klein, their number-one brainwasher, started it, and Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell and Bush continue to parrot it.

The Watergate fiasco, the Klein line tells us, was no different from what Dick Tuck used to do—just good old political pranks. Barry Goldwater, though not as a full-fledged member of The Committee for the Re-Election of the President, went so far as to say that perhaps Dick Tuck did the Watergate. And some Republican senators want Tuck called before Senator Ervin's committee which is investigating campaign espionage.

I am ready. It's my turn to make a few things perfectly clear.

Let's talk about pranks. Was the Boston Tea Party a prank? Perhaps it was satire defined as: "the use of ridicule, sarcasm, or irony to expose, at-

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tack, or deride vices, follies, and stupidities."

Without ridicule all political campaigns would be, as most are, dull and dreary. Everyone has ideas for campaign laws and at the top of my list would be a prohibition against boring the public. With "Four More Years" and "Come Home America," as catch phrases, it is not odd that more people than ever didn't bother to vote last year.

The non-incumbent who wants to throw old rascals out must attract attention, but surely even Mr. Klein & Co. can tell the difference between guerrilla theatre and gorilla tactics. The use of ridicule, sarcasm or irony doesn't cover wiretapping and burglary.

In truth, it came as no surprise to find the boys from "CREEP" were financing espionage and sabotage. When Mr. Nixon ran for the Senate against Helen Gahagan Douglas, he ran such a campaign. There was the strange morality of the Nixon Fund of 1952. And then there was the full-blooming Nixon race for governor of California in 1962.

They were all there then: Klein, Haldeman, Ziegler, Chapin, and even Segretti and Kalmbach. Scurrilous mailings appeared all over the state. Governor Pat Brown was soft on the Communists (whatever happened to them?). Doctored photographs showed the governor bowing to an Asian Communist leader and with his arm around Harry Bridges, "the well-known Communist." When Brown sued to stop the mailing, the "pranksters" involved in the fakes directly (or indirectly through their participation in the campaign) were revealed: Klein, Haldeman, Ziegler, Chapin, Segretti (ever Segretti), and Kalmbach. (John Mitchell hadn't joined the team yet.)

Now, to be perfectly clear, let's look at a real political prank. We'll call it the Chinatown caper. The basis was the unsecured loan Howard Hughes had made to Donald Nixon, the brother of the then-Vice President.

Nixon went to Chinatown and was met by the usual delegation—a Miss Chinatown, distinguished Chinese elders, and children bearing signs in English and Chinese. The English ones said, "Welcome Nixon." Nixon posed smiling for the TV cameras until an agitated Chinese elder whispered that the Chinese signs said, "How About the Hughes Loan?" Nixon, in a performance which would be outdone only by his final press conference, tore the signs from the children's hands and ripped them to shreds. It was all on the evening news.

Then, there was the "spy" on Goldwater's dreary campaign train. A small newspaper entitled "The Whistle Stop" suddenly appeared, mysteriously, each morning, a copy outside each berth. It poked fun at Barry. The Keystone Cops around the senator reacted as if they were on the Orient Express. They shook down the whole train. They found Mata Hari who turned out to be a reasonably innocent delivery girl and tossed her off the train. Since she had done nothing more than make people laugh, and because she was pretty, the Goldwater people were the heavies. One newsman referred to the gentle young lady as "the spy who was thrown out in the cold."

The sad thing about the bugging and sabotage which went on last year is, though the perpetrators were caught, Nixon still won big. Most politicians are imitative rather than creative, so they will jump at the example. Joe McGinnis' book, "The Selling of the President," was intended as an expose of inept image makers, but some politicians took it as a textbook and hired the same people McGinnis was ridiculing. I fear that as a result of Watergate, the same politicians will now want wiretaps, goon squads and faked letters.

The Democrats got few votes from the Watergate. Those of us who find wiretapping repugnant are probably in the minority. But if Senator Ervin's committee just lifts the rock up a little, a good portion of the American public may still be turned off by what they see.

I hope so. The "CREEPs" have corrupted a great American art form and don't even know the difference.