

Parade
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Shake hands and come out fighting: Bob Dole, Republican National Chairman, and Jean Westwood, his Democratic counterpart, meet to sign the fair campaign pledge. The ink was hardly dry before they began to trade accusations.

The Year of the Smear

by Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON, D.C.

On Sept. 19, a familiar ritual took place here. The chairmen of the two major political parties signed the fair campaign code. For a happy moment, Republican Bob Dole and Democrat Jean Westwood grinned at one another and grabbed hands while the flashbulbs exploded.

But once the shutters had stopped clicking and the ink had dried, the code was promptly forgotten. The same day of the signing, Dole charged that Democratic Presidential candidate George McGovern was guilty of "the worst kind of political slander." On four separate occasions, protested Dole, McGovern had compared President Nixon to Adolf Hitler.

Mrs. Westwood quickly counter-charged. She demanded that Dole explain the Republicans' "dishonest and unethical" involvement in the break-in at Democratic headquarters.

It was official. The year of the smear was underway.

Nothing new

The wheels of American politics have churned dirt upon Presidential candidates since the first election campaigns. Two centuries ago, Federalist Party propagandists circulated leaflets alleging that Thomas Jefferson was a lecher

and a drunkard. This year the political slurring has been aimed not only at this year's candidates but at the front runners for 1976, Vice President Spiro Agnew and Sen. Edward Kennedy.

The year's biggest smear was launched, appropriately enough, by Frank Capell, 64, a right-wing apostle of discord whose column appears in the *Review of the News*, the weekly publication of the John Birch Society.

Capell was indicted with others in 1965 for criminal libel against Sen. Thomas Kuchel (R., Calif.). Capell pleaded no contest and received a suspended sentence. Before he left the courtroom, he was asked by the judge for assurances that he would "never again defame the Senator nor anyone else." But the old smearmonger went right back to his poison pen.

Last June, he wrote that George McGovern, an ex-bomber pilot, was reprimanded for cowardice during World War II for refusing to finish his last mission over Europe. McGovern landed the plane, and his co-pilot had to fly it back into combat, charged Capell.

The story, totally unfounded, soon surfaced in right-wing publisher William Loeb's *Manchester Union Leader* in

New Hampshire. McGovern had to ask the Pentagon to make public his Army Air Corps personnel records to prove there was no letter of reprimand. Several members of the crew, who had flown with McGovern on his last mission, also attested to his bravery.

Lost in all the accounts and retractions was any mention of Capell's own war record. While employed by the War Production Board during World War II, Capell pleaded guilty to charges of soliciting and accepting bribes.

Three months later, Loeb splashed a second sensational story on his front page. This time, his targets were Senators Edward Kennedy and John Tunney. The paper asserted that the two Democratic Senators spent four days aboard a sloop with two lovely ladies who were "definitely not their wives."

Kennedy's companion was identified as Mrs. Amanda Burden, a pretty, 28-year-old New York socialite, who has been linked to Kennedy romantically in the past. Loeb's paper also charged that Kennedy bumped a passenger off a commuter flight on his way to his vacation sloop.

We checked out the story with witnesses, who said Kennedy definitely was not accompanied by Mrs. Burden. And the person bumped off the flight was none other than Senator Tunney,

who obligingly gave up his seat and waited for the next flight.

Tunney didn't deny that he brought along a lady friend. But at the time, his wife was filing for divorce. (The Tunneys subsequently have become reconciled.)

As evidence that the sailing trip was no romantic escapade, Tunney told us both Senators brought along, at least for part of the trip, their 11-year-old sons. Kennedy refused to discuss the episode with us, but a spokesman said so many people had been on and off the boat during the outing that it was unlikely the Senators could have ever been alone with two women.

Rumors have also started up about Spiro Agnew. His aides say whispers have reached the Vice President that he had taken cash under the table from a Baltimore businessman and that he had received psychiatric treatment. Both rumors, say aides, are totally false. The psychiatrist who is alleged to have

treated Agnew has never even met the Vice President.

Charges raised by *The New York Times* in the 1968 campaign are also still haunting Agnew. A *Times* editorial charged that Agnew before his election as Governor of Maryland joined some wealthy land speculators "in purchasing a tract of land on the probable approach route of a new, parallel span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. As Governor, he approved this route. In response to public criticism, Governor Agnew later sold his share of the land."

'Times' flubbed

The normally reliable *Times* flubbed. Actually, Agnew signed away his interest in the land before his election and directed that it be sold, at no profit to himself. In any case, he did not approve the route of the bay bridge. Nor could the *Times* prove another charge that Agnew had lied about the inheritance of some bank stock.

Like the *Times*, I also reported political charges that couldn't be proved. I broadcast over the Mutual Network that photostats had been located of traffic citations charging McGovern's first running mate, Sen. Tom Eagleton, with drunken and reckless driving. I had spoken to three sources who said they had participated in the collection and distribution of the photostats. I emphasized that I hadn't seen the photostats myself and subsequently issued a public retraction and apology.

Perhaps it is inevitable in the heat of a political campaign that false charges will be circulated. Some contend that political hyperbole may even be healthy, or at least preferable to the polls, computers and slick TV ads which have largely dehumanized politics. All but gone are the emotional bosh-mongers, as H. L. Mencken called them, whose appeals to voters were based solely on race, religion or patriotism.

But the American people, basically, believe in fair play. Someday political candidates may discover they can win more votes by running a fair campaign.