

Congress Blocking Clean-Election Bill

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We have set up a special watch on Watergate reforms to keep the public posted on what Congress is doing to prevent future Watergates. Here is our latest report.

With a great outpouring of piety, the House Administration Committee last week finally turned loose the clean-election bill. The lofty language, however, was merely the incense that disguised the smell.

Most members of Congress, having been scorched by the Watergate scandals, would like to absolve themselves of these sins before going home to face the voters in November. But they are most reluctant to reform the political system that brought them to power.

If they can get away with it, therefore, they would like to placate the public with remedies that give the appearance rather than the substance of reforms.

The most important reform is the clean-election bill. The Senate version, contains some strong provisions, which would go a long way toward preventing future Watergate abuses.

There is an unspoken arrangement on Capitol Hill, however, for handling unwanted reforms. The reforms will sail through the Senate with banners flying, only to languish and die in the House.

Then in the next session, the process starts all over again. This time the House will pass the reforms, which will suddenly encounter procedural obstacles in the Senate. Thus, the individual members in each house are able to vote for reforms in full confidence that they will never be adopted.

Under this arrangement, the Senate clean-election bill struck a snag many months ago in the House Administration Committee. Chairman Wayne Hays (D-Ohio) bumped the bill along like a frog filled with buckshot. "He dawdled, fussed, fumed and screamed," one committee member confided to my reporter Jim Moorhead.

"I did the best I could," Hays countered. The pressures of the Watergate disclosures compelled him at last to let the bill out of his clutches.

But it is now safely lodged in the logjam of the House impeachment debate. "I wouldn't despair if the bill didn't come up until September," says Hays. He promised that "it won't go down the drain."

Even if the House bill should pass, however, it has been neatly tailored to protect the incumbents. For appearances sake, it contains most of the strong Senate provisions. But the reforms would be enforced by officials who take their orders from the people they would be expected to regulate.

Under the House bill, the supervisory board would include the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate. Not only are they subject to the will of the incumbents they would supervise, but they would have no power to prosecute violators. The regulations on the supervisory board would also be subject to a Senate-House veto.

We will continue to keep a watch on these reforms and to report to the voters before November what their elected representatives do about them. For we believe there is nothing wrong with the political system that a good election won't cure.

Soviet Cooperation—The Soviets, not wishing to jeopardize their ties with world revolutionary movements, have opposed strong international anti-hijacking action. But behind the scenes, the Soviets are cooperating with the West to waylay air terrorists.

Soviet officials alerted Western governments, for example, on the movements of three Japanese terrorists, one of them a member of the extremist "Japanese Red Army," who were allegedly plotting a hijacking.

The story of this undercover Soviet cooperation is contained in secret intelligence reports obtained by Rep. John Murphy (D-N.Y.), who is seeking stronger measures to curb air piracy.

Soviet agents, according to

one intelligence cable, heard reports that the Japanese activist, Okudaira Fusako, had gone to Hong Kong. They reported that two other "Japanese radical youths, Okita Kozen and Sasaki Michihiro" had made a mysterious trip from Tokyo to Bangkok.

Although the Soviets couldn't substantiate all these reports, they obligingly gave them "wide dissemination" through "Soviet officials" overseas.

The intelligence reports show that the names of the three potential hijackers were divulged "in Malaysia, Laos and Senegal by Soviet embassy and Aeroflot (airline) officials." All as a courtesy to these lands.

Obviously, the Russians had good information. On July 15, a 26-year-old Japanese hijacker, Akira Iwakoshi, held a Japanese airliner for ransom. His intent was to free the jailed leader of the Japanese Red Army. When he failed, he slit his throat.

Footnote: In a letter to House Commerce Committee Chairman Harley O. Staggers (D-W.Va.) Murphy said he had received information from Federal Aviation Administration sources that four international airports are "wide open to terrorist attacks." Murphy identified them as London's Heathrow field, Copenhagen, Buenos Aires and Panama City.

1974, United Feature Syndicate, Inc.