

By RUSSELL BAKER

WASHINGTON, March 8—Oddly enough, a lot of people have been surprised to learn that the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation is putting up \$400,000 (or maybe \$100,000; the figures are still confused) to help pay for the Republican National Convention in San Diego this August.

Apparently large numbers of people are ignorant of the mechanics of the American political system; for this reason, a simple explanation may be justified.

In setting up a political system, you have two choices. You can have public politics, or you can have commercial politics.

In America, the decision was to go with commercial politics. The big argument in its favor was that public politics would be so dull that nobody would watch it.

The other big argument was that nobody could possibly get rich from a public politics system.

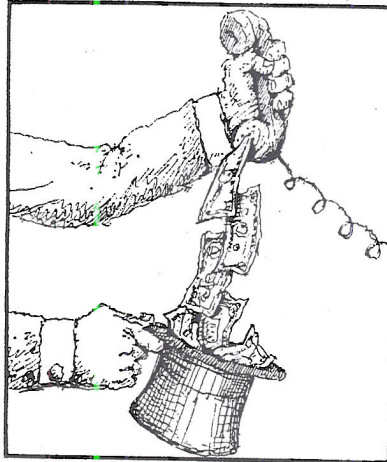
In commercial politics, companies with lots of money ("moolah," to use the old Yale euphemism) shop around for a candidate or a political party whom they can sponsor. When they find one, they make an appointment and ask if there is anything that they, as American citizens dedicated to the proposition that life is sweeter if you have a friend at the Justice Department, can give him.

The candidate or party, as the case may be, replies, "Moolah, moolah! Moolah, moolah!"

Very few sponsors, of course, will put money into a party or a candidate without receiving some advance idea of what they will get for their moolah.

For this purpose, most candidates and both major parties prepare what are called "pilots." These are care-

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Stan Mack

fully produced dramatizations which give the potential sponsor the flavor of the campaign or government which he will be investing in.

International Telephone and Telegraph, for example, probably didn't pledge a cent of its money for the Republican National Convention until its representatives saw a "pilot" of the performance. It is rumored, in fact, that they were so exhausted by the 64 hours of unabated oratorical praise for President Nixon which the "pilot" required them to sit through, that their first inclination was to forget the Republicans and, instead, sponsor Representative Bella Abzug's campaign for re-election in New York.

What may have prompted them to change their minds is not known. Perhaps they were shown a "post-election pilot."

This is a widely used device in which the candidate gives the reluctant sponsor a glimpse of what life will be like

after he, the candidate, has been elected.

If the sponsor is, like I.T.T., a conglomerate with antitrust problems, it might show several of the conglomerate's executives attending a wiener roast and pitching horseshoes with lawyers from the Justice Department's Antitrust Division.

Democratic candidates, who are just as dependent as Republicans on the sponsorship of oil corporations, have for years been showing oil men a "post-election pilot" in which the entire Senate Finance Committee votes unanimously to compel all widows and orphans to pay higher taxes on their stock dividends so that the Treasury can raise enough money to give higher tax refunds to oil men.

Many persons, of course, would like to sponsor a candidate or political party, so that the Senate Finance Committee and the Justice Department might also feel well disposed toward them. Naturally, because of the vast sums of money required, very few individuals can afford to buy into the system.

This is a fortunate circumstance for the Government, for if just anybody at all could afford to be a sponsor it would be very difficult for the Government to do some of its favorite things.

Imagine, by way of example, what might have happened had Father Philip Berrigan, the militant antiwar activist now on trial in Federal court, had the moolah to sponsor a big piece of the Republican National Convention. Would the case have been settled out of court, at a wiener roast perhaps with some of the fellows from the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department?

It is a dirty question, and it would be nasty to ask it if commercial politics were not such a dirty business.