

Political Warfare

This Time Around It's Not So Funny

Remember Dick Tuck, the "Merry Prankster" of the 1960 Presidential campaign? His forte was the infiltration of Republican election efforts—as when he put a girl aboard the Nixon campaign train from whence she dispensed Kennedy press releases.

Very funny. Press and public howled with delight. A comic exaggeration of an aspect of the American election process normally hidden from public view: the effort to confound the enemy by nosing out his campaign plans and fouling them up.

But now it's 1972, another Presidential election year, and the fun is gone. Seven men with Republican ties have been indicted in the June "intelligence" raid on the offices of the Democratic National Committee and last week brought further sensational charges. A former Assistant Attorney General was accused of having obtained confidential data from the Justice Department for possible use in behalf of the Nixon campaign. And there were allegations in The Washington Post of "a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage" against the Democrats, "directed by officials of the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President."

Denials and counter-charges have followed fast and furious, and at week's end many of the accusations still lacked full substantiation. But one fact was clear: Political "espionage" was no longer a laughing matter; it was fast becoming a major issue of the campaign.

These were the major developments:

- The Washington Post, citing "information in F.B.I. and Department of Justice files," charged that since 1971 the Republicans had financed a special squad assigned to pull dirty tricks on Democratic Presidential candidates. Much of the information, The Post said, had been discovered by the F.B.I. in the process of checking the Watergate case.

The article listed some of the squad's alleged handiwork. One example: The

politically damaging letter, published in The Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader Feb. 24, that accused Senator Edward Muskie of calling Americans of French-Canadian descent "Canucks." The Post said Ken W. Clawson, one of its former reporters and now Deputy Director of White House Communications, had told another of its reporters, Marilyn Berger, "I wrote the letter." Mr. Clawson now insists he said no such thing.

Another example: Charges by an assistant attorney general in Nashville, Tenn., to the effect that the Republicans were seeking to hire four young lawyers to serve as undercover agents in the campaigns of Democratic Presidential candidates. The man doing the recruiting, it was alleged, was Donald H. Segretti, 31, a lawyer in the Los Angeles area. In varying degrees, the four lawyers have confirmed the charge, but Mr. Segretti could not be reached for comment on the article.

The "intelligence" operations of the Republican squad, according to The Post, included: "Following members of Democratic candidates' families and assembling dossiers on their personal lives; forging letters and distributing them under the candidates' letterheads; leaking false and manufactured items to the press; throwing campaign schedules into disarray; seizing confidential campaign files, and investigating the lives of dozens of Democratic campaign workers." A spokesman at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President said of The Post's story: "not only fiction but a collection of absurdities."

On Friday, The Post quoted Senator Muskie as charging that he had been the target, during the Democratic primaries, of a "systematic campaign of sabotage." He listed a number of examples, adding "we could never pinpoint who was doing it."

- The New York Times reported, Friday, that after leaving his post as Assistant Attorney General to join the Republican committee, Robert C. Mardian had sought information of a confidential nature from Justice Department files. The article cited sources close to the Watergate investigation.

According to The Times story, after joining the committee, Mr. Mardian made telephone calls to former Justice Department associates for data, most of it in the confidential files. And on at least one occasion, it was alleged, he sent two men later indicted in the Watergate affair to pick up information at the Department.

Mr. Mardian retorted that the only request of any kind he had made of the Justice Department, after leaving its employ, was for information about possible civil disturbances at the G.O.P. convention in Miami Beach.

- In Congress last week, a House committee investigating the Watergate break-in, which involved the installation of electronic surveillance devices in the Democratic campaign headquarters, reached a dead-end.

Wright Patman, chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, had sought from his committee the power to issue subpoenas to compel testimony from some 40 witnesses—but the committee turned him down. So he invited four top Nixon aides to testify. One question he had in mind: How had \$114,000 in Nixon campaign contributions been funneled from a Mexico City bank, to Houston, to Washington, and finally to the Miami bank account of Bernard L. Barker, one of the seven men arrested in the Watergate case? Another question: How high up into Administration circles did knowledge of the "intelligence" operations extend? But the aides were not expected to accept the invitation, and they did not.

That seemed to finish the Congressional end of the Watergate matter. But on Friday, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, as chairman of a Senate judiciary subcommittee, ordered a pre-election "preliminary inquiry" into the affair. Just how far the inquiry would go remained uncertain, but in a letter to the committee Mr. Kennedy indicated he would move beyond Watergate, itself, to investigate whether there has been "political espionage and sabotage" during the Presidential campaign.

The letter also made it clear that Mr. Kennedy intended to issue subpoenas to force reluctant witnesses to appear before the committee.

The response to the new developments on the "espionage" front has been widespread and heated. A New York Times editorial, for example, ended with these sentences: "No national party and no incumbent Administration has ever set out in this systematic fashion to invade the privacy, disrupt the activities, and discredit the leadership of the political opposition. These are ambitions and police-state tactics which have no place in a democracy."

And in an evident effort to offset the "intelligence" furor, President Nixon's campaign director, Clark MacGregor, charged that there has been an outbreak of "violence directed at the Nixon campaign" and that some of the incidents had been linked to McGovern supporters. He urged Mr. McGovern to "join us" in preventing campaign violence. Replied Kirby Jones for the McGovern organization: "It's sort of like Al Capone asking the innocent citizens let's you and I get together and we'll stop crime."