

Political Espionage Escalates

White House Link Is Unique Aspect of '72 Cases

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Charges of dirty politics are nothing new in American elections.

What sets the presidential race of 1972 apart are the allegations that the White House itself has been deeply involved in the planning and execution of an elaborate, covert scheme of campaign wrongdoing.

A whole array of surreptitious activities has purportedly been undertaken, some of them just mischievous, but some sinister and probably illegal.

Based on his study of this and past campaigns, Sam Archibald, executive director of the nonpartisan Fair Campaign Practices Committee, said in an interview last week, "there is a great difference of degree."

Leading Republicans have belittled the charges. John Mitchell told a columnist for Newsday recently that it was "all the kind of thing

News Analysis

that overzealous, bright young men do sometimes in a silly way in a campaign."

But the findings of federal investigators show a good deal more: an extensive undercover operation with scores of agents around the country, well financed and run from a high level, from offices close to the President himself.

Acts of political espionage and sabotage, according to the investigators, represented a basic strategy of President Nixon's re-election effort. The purpose, they say, was to divide the Democratic Party during the primary campaign to the extent that it could not reunite after choosing a presidential nominee.

Almost every election, local and national, has its shares of smears, and vote stealing is the perennial

See WATERGATE, A19, Col. 1

Rundown of men linked to political spying charges.

Page A18

WATERGATE, From AI

charge made against the big city machines. Spying on the opposition is also an accepted fact.

But no one in a sampling of seasoned Washington observers, legislators and journalists with decades of experience could recall an election in which some of the President's closest aides were accused of conspiring by such means to cripple the opposition.

"Any campaign is security conscious," said one moderate GOP senator, "you want to know what the fellow is up to. But the limits are tightly drawn. You don't rifle your opponent's mailbox or tap his telephone."

"Candidates and their campaign organizations have always tried to find out what the other side is planning," said Archibald, "but no apparatus as extensive as this has ever been described before."

"You can accept aldermen getting involved in this sort of stuff," said a longtime aide to a Midwest Republican senator, "but the idea that the President might be involved, your system finds that hard to digest."

Starting with the night of June 17, when five men were arrested inside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel, a pattern has emerged, weaving threads of intended political sabotage and surveillance with secret campaign funds and suspicious money transfers.

Investigators found a revolving intelligence fund of as much as \$700,000 under the personal control of John Mitchell, while he served as the nation's highest legal officer.

Dwight L. Chapin, the president's appointments secretary, the man who sits at his door, has been described as the Washington contact for a paid political saboteur.

FBI and Justice Department files show that in primaries from New Hampshire to California, Republican operatives took a hand, forging letters and flyers and trying to infiltrate the Democratic campaign.

Among the possible violations of the law covered in disclosures to date are: tampering with a grand jury; obstruction of justice through the destruction of evidence; banking violations resulting from the transfer of funds through Mexico; failure to report secret expenditures from the intelligence fund; fraudulent use of the mail, and forgery.

In the Watergate incident, seven men have been indicted on charges of burglary, possession of eavesdropping devices, conspiracy and interception and disclosure of oral communications—wiretapping.

In the revelations stemming from the Watergate case, accusations have been made against two former cabinet officers, a former assistant attorney general, five present officials at the Committee for the Re-election of the President, four present White House aides and a lawyer who is known primarily for his handling of private matters for the President.

The seven men indicted for the Watergate bugging include three more presidential campaign or White House aides.

The details of all this have been amassed by investigators for the Justice Department, the FBI and the General Accounting Office, along with newsmen for this and other publications.

GOP campaign spokesmen and the White House have denounced printing of "hearsay," "innuendo" and "unsubstantiated" charges. The charges do remain to be proved. But thus far, none has been specifically rebutted.

Until recently, it was the conventional wisdom of the campaign—acknowledged by the Democrats—that the Watergate case and subsequent revelations were having only a minimal impact on the voters.

A Harris poll, published last week but taken in early October, showed that 76 per cent of the voters had followed the case, but a majority still believed that it was all "mostly politics" and that such spying is common around election time.

That, however, was before the scale of the allegations spread beyond the isolated Watergate incident to the whole campaign strategy.

George McGovern has taken to charging that the President is "up to his ears in political sabotage." The Nixon camp responds by denouncing the charges, but the effect is to make scandal a constant theme of oratory on both sides.

Polls so far do not indicate that the issue has helped McGovern's popularity. But in Bridgeport Thursday night, Vice President Agnew was greeted by hecklers chanting "Watergate."

On television last weekend, John D. Ehrlichman, the president's chief assistant for domestic matters, stepped lightly through a series of questions about the allegedly sinister side of the

effort to re-elect Mr. Nixon.

First, he said, he was unaware of any campaign strategy of political espionage and subversion. Then he added:

"This kind of thing, though, finding out what the other fellow's schedule is and so on, has gone on since time immemorial and we all heard about the merry prankster Dick Tuck and the tricks he pulled on President Nixon.

"This kind of thing you know has been in American politics as long as I can remember."

Dick Tuck, who is still rattling around somewhere in the Democratic Party's campaign apparatus, is a political practical joker.

In 1962, when Mr. Nixon was running for governor of California, Tuck donned a trainman's hat and waved

the campaign train out of the San Luis Obispo station just as the candidate was beginning to address a whistle stop crowd.

In 1964, Tuck planted a young woman spy on Barry Goldwater's whistle-stop train, who then passed around a newsletter poking fun at the Goldwater candidacy to reporters' compartments. She was discovered and expelled.

"Political espionage can be funny, diverting and revealing," Bruce L. Felknor, a former director of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee observed in his historical survey called "Dirty Politics" published in 1966. The shenanigans of Dick Tuck, he said, fall into that category.

But, he added, the parapolitical world of espionage and harassment "can be

quite shabby and disgusting depending in large measure on who is doing it and from what point of view."

As evidence of the darker side, he cites the case in 1964 when the Democrats discovered a Republican effort to enlist a teletypist at party headquarters, whose job was to send out secret campaign schedules, as a paid agent.

The teletypist said that a GOP official told him that unless he cooperated, information about his past criminal record would be sent to his employers.

The plan failed because the teletypist went to a superior and the GOP successfully quieted the Democratic protest with a denial.

Later in the same campaign, according to Felknor, a black man who left the implication that he was with

the Republican National Committee ordered 1,400,000 copies in New Jersey of a simulated telegram urging other blacks to write in Martin Luther King's name on the ballot. He paid in cash.

The flyer was signed "Committee for Negroes in Government, Louisville, Ky." Eventually a black GOP official was indicted for violating a New Jersey law having to do with proper identification of campaign literature. At trial, however, he was acquitted.

It was never established whether the money actually came from the Republicans or even whether a "Committee for Negroes in Government" actually existed.

"These maneuvers were obviously beyond Barry Goldwater's knowledge or control," Felknor concludes, "but somebody in the hier-

archy knew what was happening, coordinated the efforts and paid the bills. Federal investigation could do much to purify the system."

What has happened in 1972 is that a number of investigations—official and unofficial—have been precipitated by the arrest of those five men at the Watergate and their links to the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

It may be, as is apparently the prevailing view of the political experts, that the alleged espionage-sabotage apparatus being turned up is the most elaborate ever.

Or, as some cynics suggest, it may be that because of the unprecedented scrutiny of the Watergate investigations that this is just the first time that a full apparatus has been disclosed.