

Little Watergate

The kind of bizarre politics that characterized the Watergate burglary in Washington has apparently been practiced in New Jersey as well. Authorities there are investigating an alleged attempt to ruin a Democratic Assemblyman by planting narcotics in his automobile and home. Kenneth A. Gerwertz, the legislator in whose house the drugs were found by police acting on an anonymous tip, has charged "a cold, calculated, well-planned conspiracy." And the police are sufficiently impressed by the circumstances to indicate the imminent arrest of suspects, including close associates of James M. Turner, a Republican State Senator.

It is perfectly possible, of course, that the conspiracy was exactly the reverse—a plot to destroy Senator Turner, as he contends. In that case, presumably, the supposed victim would have planted the drugs himself in order to frame the Senator. Obviously it is not possible at this stage of the case to entertain an opinion as to which of the two parties, if either, is the culprit and which the victim. But what is clear is that politics in Gloucester County, New Jersey, like politics in Washington, has taken on a Byzantine coloration.

That fact has an ominous importance, however the case turns out. The long history of the Republic is replete with political scandals, but overwhelmingly they have revolved around charges, false or valid, of corruption in office. They have not grown out of criminal acts and conspiracies by one set of politicians or another to frame their opponents or in other ways to make crime a calculated part of the political process.

Only if those who have now reintroduced these ancient techniques to modern politics are severely punished—whoever and wherever they are—can the democratic system be spared a corruption more corrosive, and in the end more deadly, than all the "isms" ever conjured up by security-minded Congressmen.