

## Another Dirty Trick

The appearance before the Senate Watergate committee of Senator McGovern's former campaign aides served a vital purpose of torpedoing the self-serving claims of pro-Administration witnesses that the so-called dirty tricks were as American as apple pie. These claims were a cynical attempt to whitewash the unethical and criminal acts committed in the cause of President Nixon's re-election by making it appear that everybody had long been doing the same.

No one would deny that abuses are committed by both parties in the heat of campaigns; but in mounting their "you're another" counterattack, Messrs. Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Buchanan and others deliberately chose to bring the entire process of American electoral politics into disrepute. The hypocrisy of that maneuver becomes evident when it is compared with Mr. Ehrlichman's fatuous, flag-waving speech from the witness chair extolling the virtue of Washington politics.

Frank Mankiewicz, the McGovern campaign manager, was clearly right when he said: "I think it is important for someone to state, clearly and finally, that these 'dirty tricks' are not politics as usual, that American politics does not include any history of, or tolerance for, sabotage, espionage, perjury, forgery and burglary."

The committee interrogators may have been merely trying to demonstrate even-handedness in questioning Mr. Mankiewicz and Rick Stearns, another McGovern aide, about Mr. Haldeman's charge that McGovern telephones had been used to organize violent anti-Nixon demonstrations outside the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles during the campaign.

It now appears, however, that those charges were themselves merely another form of dirty tricks, deployed this time in the Senate Caucus room in defense of the dirty tricks of the campaign. The demonstrations, as police observers testified, had been peaceful and thus within the legal and constitutional limits of free assembly. How the demonstration was organized or with what resources was therefore irrelevant.

Senator Lowell Weicker was right in suggesting that, in pursuing this question, committee lawyers and Senator Howard Baker were treading dangerous ground, seemingly equating lawful expression of political opposition with dirty tricks.

The American people will surely understand that those who have so recently demeaned American election politics are resorting to just one more dirty trick by spreading the lie that their misdeeds were politics-as-usual.