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# Strong Arm And Red Hand

By Tom Wicker

Chairman George A. Spater of American Airlines probably understated the case last week when he said that "a large part of the money raised from the business community for political purposes is given in fear of what would happen if it were not given." Such money, in short, is largely pay-off money, even if nothing is specifically purchased; yet, even as the Watergate investigations are finally exposing the system, another Senate committee is trying to ease off on the stronger campaign financing law that went into effect in 1972.

Look at the position Mr. Spater was in last year when the mysterious Herbert Kalmbach put the bite on American Airlines for \$100,000 for the Nixon re-election fund. Corporate political contributions under old and new laws were illegal; but Mr. Spater did not have to be told that:

¶American Airlines' plan to merge with Western Air Lines, a bid to take over the promising Western tourism routes, was just then pending before the Civil Aeronautics Board.

¶Mr. Kalmbach (who now apparently contends that, like John Dean, he saw little of President Nixon in recent years) was then billed as Mr. Nixon's private attorney and leading fund-raiser.

¶Mr. Kalmbach was also an attorney for United Airlines, a competitor of American that had filed its opposition to the American-Western merger.

In all those circumstances, Mr. Spater could hardly help but conclude—Mr. Kalmbach would have had to make no representations—that if American did not wish an evil eye cast on the merger by the Nixon Administration, it had better come through; and it did, with an illegal

the President of the United States; and that Mr. Spater and his colleagues should have resisted rather than yielding suggests mostly that those who are without such sin are entitled to make the point.

Eastern Airlines, confronted with a similar request, refused—which was at least easier for it to do, because it was not in the same supplicant's position as American. It remains to be seen how many other corporations were strong-armed for contributions, and yielded—not so much, probably, as a quid pro quo for any specific favor as "in fear of what would happen if it were not given." Special

Prosecutor Cox and his staff are going deeply into this pernicious practice, apparently armed with a good list of the companies involved.

Despite such disclosures, despite the documented fact that the Nixon campaign collected huge sums of cash that were improperly reported or not reported at all, despite the fact that the Senate's own special committee investigating all aspects of 1972 campaign abuses does not plan to delve into the financing aspects until this fall, the Senate Rules Committee already has voted to weaken significantly the new campaign-money rules put into effect last year.

One of the committee's revisions would repeal the provision barring companies and unions with Government contracts from raising political funds through individual contributions; the other would permit political contributors to withhold their addresses and occupations.

But the real need is for Congress to make it impossible for companies like American Airlines to be put under the kind of pressures exerted on them last year; and, on the other hand, to make it impossible for companies or industries to grease Government palms with political contributions (as the dairymen did in 1971 and 1972) in hopes of favorable political decisions. The best way to do that is to provide an equitable means of Federal financing for Federal election—perhaps, as the current Stevenson-Mathias bill would do, by a combination of Government money and strictly limited individual contributions, pegged to sensible spending limits.

It is not clear whether the Nixon Administration went further than have other Administrations and candidates of either party in squeezing money out of people and organizations with good reason to fear the Government or court its favor; but it is clear that such practices have been all too possible to any group of men fleetingly in power. To put a stop to that possibility is the one major need indisputably disclosed by the Watergate investigations.

Whatever its antecedents in other Administrations, incidentally, the American Airlines episode rebukes those who have persisted in picturing the Watergate matter as limited essentially to the wiretapping and burglary at Democratic party headquarters in 1972, as well as those who have insisted that ordinary political corruption was not involved. With every day that passes, every fresh disclosure, every stale denial that soon proves inoperative, it becomes more apparent that the Nixon Administration has been as unsavory and unprincipled as any on record—more so than most—and has been caught red-handed to a degree unmatched in at least half a century.

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## IN THE NATION

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\$75,000. The fact that the merger later was disapproved anyway has little to do with the impropriety of American Airlines having been put in such a position by a representative of