

Election Monitor Calls Watergate Dirtiest Politics

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From News Dispatches

The Fair Campaign Practices Committee, a nonpartisan, privately funded organization, said yesterday the Watergate scandal was the worst case of dirty politics it had encountered in nearly 20 years.

"The sordid scandal called the Watergate affair is not simply more of the same tactics which have made 'politics' a dirty word," the committee said. "It is a conscious conspiracy to violate laws, to manipulate voters, and to make a mockery of the democratic system of self-government."

The committee also disagreed with President Nixon's April 30 suggestion that Watergate be seen as only the latest example of the kind of "shady tactics" long used by politicians. It said tactics associated with Watergate were "not symptoms of a cancer" running through the entire political system.

"Theft, spying, sabotage and subversion are not the tactics of the political professions," the committee said. "In nearly 20 years of

studying the political process, the Fair Campaign Committee has uncovered no campaign tactics comparable in extent or in potential damage to a free, self-governing society."

The comments were made in a committee report released by Samuel J. Archibald, the committee's executive director.

The report said "a simple unsophisticated form of spying"—the clipping of news stories about an opponent, collecting his public statements and campaign literature, and attending his political rallies to determine crowd size and reaction—had long been an accepted part of campaigning.

But activities in connection with the June 17 break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters, the report said, had included such unethical and illegal actions as the theft of campaign documents, electronic eavesdropping, personal vilification, falsification of letters

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and advertisements, stacking of polls, illegal financial reporting, spying on opponents, and attempts to cover up apparent crimes.

The committee said complaints about unfair campaign practices filed by both major parties jumped 19 per cent in 1972—but that Watergate did not account for the increase. Of the 80 complaints filed last year, the report said, only two dealt with the break-in.

One complaint, the report said, was filed June 19—two days after the burglary—by a Democratic congressman. The other, filed Oct. 24, came from the Democratic National Committee.

Committee requests for comment by Republican National Committee officials were "turned aside" on grounds that the matter was before the courts, the report said.

The report noted that the chairmen of both the Democratic and Republican National Committees had signed a pledge of fair campaign practices prior to the 1972 election.

In other developments:

• The New York Times reported that Federal Prosecutors now have evidence directly linking former Presidential Adviser John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, to illegal activities against Daniel Ellsberg in 1971, including the Sept. 3 break-in at this psychiatrist's office engineered by the "plumbers" unit. The Times, quoting sources close to the

investigation, said prosecutors have concluded those activities were "a major factor" behind the White House decision to cover up Watergate a year later.

• Ehrlichman, who resigned along with Haldeman April 30, said in an interview with ABC yesterday that he was "surprised" when he learned of the Ellsberg incident about a week after it happened, and that his reaction was "one of strong disapproval." Court documents filed at the Pentagon Papers trial recently in Los Angeles quoted Ehrlichman as telling the burglars after he learned of the raid "not to do it again."

• Democratic Party chairman Robert S. Strauss criticized President Nixon's statement that the Watergate probe was limited because of national security. "I think the public will understand the difference between national security and Nixon security," Strauss said.

Strauss described the events surrounding the Watergate break-in as a "massive, total breakdown at the Executive level" in the American political process. He appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" (WRC).

• In another TV interview, CBS "Face the Nation" (WTOP) Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) also disagreed with Mr. Nixon's security contention. "One of the good things that are going on, if there is any good thing, is that I think it's going to show the people the dangers of secrecy, as well as the danger of trying to blanket everything with the two words 'national security,'" he said.