

Victor Lasky

More Adventures Of Dick Tuck

Washington

IT ALL DEPENDS whose ox is gored. Consider all the weeping over alleged acts of Republican sabotage directed against the Democrats in last year's campaign. One would think that the very foundations of the Republic were threatened because someone telephoned Walter Cronkite and said he was Frank Man-kiewicz.



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The irony is that the very people doing the most weeping are still chortling over admitted acts of sabotage perpetrated against Republicans for at least 15 years by Dick Tuck, a self-styled political prankster employed by the Democrats.

Dick Tuck's antics have become of interest in view of the forthcoming investigation of a Senate committee into the Watergate affair and related acts of sabotage allegedly conducted in the recent campaign.

The question is whether Tuck, whose last known address is given as a Sausalito saloon known as no name, will be called by the select group headed by Senator Sam L. Ervin Jr. of North Carolina.

The question arises because the Democratic - controlled Senate wants no part of looking into campaigns in which the Democrats did the sabotaging.

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NEVERTHELESS, it has been established that Tuck did work for Senator George McGovern at least until the Watergate affair erupted. His job, as suggested by a friendly article in the Village Voice, was to "discombobulate" McGovern's opponents in the presidential primary contests — most notably that of Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine.

Senator Muskie claims to have suffered as a result of pranks played against him in such states as New Hampshire. The White House has been blamed for some of those pranks. But it was George McGovern who benefited most from them. Was McGovern's paid aide, Dick Tuck, responsible?

The article in the Village Voice of November 23, 1972, contains a great deal of material that could be valuable to a Senate committee truly interested in probing political sabotage.

For example, the story is told of how, during Richard Nixon's gubernatorial race of 1962, he stepped onto the observation car platform to begin a speech when the train suddenly began to move. A switchman had flashed a signal to the engineer and the train rolled away.

That "switchman" was none other than Dick Tuck.

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THE EPISODE occurred in San Luis Obispo. What the Village Voice writer, Paul Hoffman, failed to mention, however, is the fact that the prank, funny as it was, could have resulted in injuries to people standing close to the train.

"At another Nixon rally during the campaign," wrote Hoffman, "Tuck lingered outside the arena and switched the identification signs on the motorcade buses. The candidate wound up at the airport, while visiting dignitaries were speeded to a TV studio where a Nixon interview had been scheduled."

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ACCORDING to Hoffman, Tuck is as much a master of disguise as the late Lon Chaney. "To gain entry, he has impersonated telephone repairmen and railroad workers, messenger boys and — until the signs of age started showing up — college students.

One of Tuck's more amusing feats was planting a "spy" on Barry Goldwater's campaign train in 1964. "For two successive mornings, the candidate's exasperated staff and a delighted news corps awoke to find a newsletter, the Whistle Stop, slipped under the compartment doors. It was filled with Democratic propaganda and anti - Goldwater jokes . . .

"Finally, the culprit was caught — Moira O'Connor, a 23 - year - old Sarah Lawrence student who had climbed aboard as a 'free-lance magazine writer.' She was unceremoniously bounced from the train while the correspondents filed chortling copy about 'the spy who was thrown out in the cold.' Tuck was so delighted with his stunt that he personally showed up to claim credit for it."

Goldwater thought it was a good joke, too. And the press had lots of laughs over it.

But, for some reason, the press doesn't seem to think that pranks allegedly carried out by Republicans against Democrats can be that funny.

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