

The Power Of *Ferdie* Money

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Oct. 6—At the Senate hearings on Nelson Rockefeller's nomination for Vice President, there was a solemn discussion of whether his family's money gave it power. Mr. Rockefeller dismissed that notion as a "myth." He hoped it would be "exposed and dissipated."

It was a wonder that no Senator laughed out loud, or alternatively clutched his stomach. For no one needs to make subtle study of the Rockefeller holdings to find an attempt at influence. The family has spent millions in plain old cash money for the purpose of political power: To elect Nelson Rockefeller.

The last time he ran for Governor of New York, in 1970, he and his relatives reported spending \$4.6 million on his campaign. The leading authority on American campaign finance, Herbert E. Alexander, estimates that the Rockefeller family spent \$10 to \$12 million on his campaigns for Governor and another \$12 million on his tries for President in 1964 and 1968. In the use of one family's money for political power, there has probably been nothing like it in American history.

Nor is the campaign money all. Nelson Rockefeller made himself acceptable to the academic and journalistic establishment by surrounding himself with a highly paid staff of lawyers, egg heads and writers. He

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promoted himself through two costly commissions on "national goals" and "critical choices." And it worked. He would certainly never have made it so far on only his natural charm, brains, wink and grin.

Now we discover that he was actually buying political security, too, though of course in the most decorous way.

In 1960 he lent \$100,000 to the New York State Republican Chairman, L. Judson Morhouse, to buy some real estate on Long Island. Mr. Rockefeller's spokesman explained that the chairman's job was unsalaried and the Governor had wanted him to have some income so he would be less subject "to temptation." Or more subject to his benefactor?

Mr. Morhouse, still not beyond temptation, was later convicted of bribery. Governor Rockefeller commuted the sentence. Then he wrote off \$86,000 of the loan, making it a gift.

Mr. Rockefeller also gave \$50,000 to Henry Kissinger three days before the Nixon Administration took office in 1969, and an unspecified amount to William J. Ronan, chairman of the New York Port Authority. The spokesman said the latter gift had been motivated by "friendship and the Governor's desire to help keep a good man in government." All this has come out into the open only because the Senate committee demanded and got Mr. Rockefeller's tax returns.

Richard Nixon nearly had to leave the ticket in 1952 when it was found that a number of businessmen had contributed to a fund to supplement his public salary. With many contributors, improper influence might be hard to find. But it is surely much more dangerous, and a clearer violation of principle, to have a single immensely rich man giving large sums of money to key officials.

The lack of public interest in Mr. Rockefeller's nomination for Vice President has been rather odd all along. After Watergate, one would have thought that the necessary symbols for high national office were candor, courage and respect for law. Nelson Rockefeller's record and character are to the contrary.

Law has been treated by Mr. Rockefeller as an instrumental tool of politics. He kept proposing welfare residence rules after the Supreme Court had held them unconstitutional—because they appealed to the voters' mood. Politics also underlay his tremendous campaign for a drug law whose irrational savagery probably exceeded anything in Anglo-American practice since the horrors described by Dickens; even in amended form, with automatic life instead of death sentences, the law has been held unconstitutional by one New York court.

At Attica, he refused to make the trip to the prison that those on the scene believed could avert slaughter. To this day he has not had the honor or the decency to admit what happened afterward: The killing of 39 persons by state policemen firing broadside into a crowd. On those points the record is that of an inhumane opportunist.

But aside from that record, there is the inescapable question of money. As a symbol of this country's values it is bad enough that our laws allow one man to inherit hundreds of millions and, sometimes, to pay no income tax. It would be scandalous if Congress did not carefully consider the effect of making a man with such economic power Vice President and very possibly a 1976 Presidential nominee. What an irony it would be if, after Watergate, we let someone who has abused the power of money and politics so grossly slip into our highest office.