

TOM BRADEN

Four questions trouble McGovern in the wake of the latest polls

WASHINGTON—George McGovern spent last weekend asking himself a number of questions. The questions are pertinent to him because he is the Democratic nominee for President, but for that very reason they are pertinent to the rest of us, too.

I had a long talk with McGovern over the weekend and the questions he asked himself came up more or less in the sequence below.

Question No. 1 is this: Why do the American people think that Richard Nixon is more to be trusted than George McGovern? The polls say they do, and by a large majority. The figures shock and perplex McGovern. How did they get this opinion? After the wiretapping. After the grain deal. After John Mitchell and Maurice Stans and the \$700,000 in secret funds. After Gen. Lavelle. Was he lying to Mr. Nixon, or was Mr. Nixon lying to the public? It must be one or the other. Even Mr. Nixon's announcement that there would be no tax increase. Sen. William Saxbe of Ohio, a fellow Republican, remarked that there must be an element of deceit in that statement. But so there has been in much of Mr. Nixon's career. Yet the American people think he is more to be trusted? It boggles the mind.

Question No. 2: What has McGovern done to be considered less trustworthy than Mr. Nixon? Is it that he isn't yet known? Is it that he has been scatter-shot, taking on too many subjects; not concentrating on the single issue of trust?

Then comes Question No. 3, posed this

past weekend by a team of reporters from The Washington Post who have been scouring the country asking people why they thought what they thought.

Question No. 3 is this: Do people think that because McGovern dropped Sen. Thomas Eagleton from the ticket, McGovern is not trustworthy? It is a terrible question because if the answer is in the affirmative, there is nothing McGovern can do about it. He believes that he handled the Eagleton problem as fairly and humanely as it was possible to handle it. He does not wish that he had not said that he supported Eagleton "1,000 per cent." He did support him 1,000 per cent. Do voters blame him because he changed his mind? Would they want to elect a President who stuck to an early opinion in the face of overwhelming fresh evidence that the opinion was wrong? Is it better to be consistent or to be right?

Then there is Question No. 4: The polls show that the American people believe Richard Nixon has kept his promise to end the war. Moreover they show that the American people approve of the bombing of Vietnam. McGovern finds it hard to believe they believe that. Do they not know that most of the bombs are being dropped in an area where the enemy is not to be found? Do they not reason therefore that they are killing thousands of innocent civilians? Are they so tired of the war that they don't listen?

They are—all four questions—the questions of a worried man, which is what you would expect McGovern to be. But if the questions are pertinent to all of us, perhaps they will worry you, too.