

Who in the White House entitled to verbally stone Sen. McGovern?

WASHINGTON — Now that the campaign is over, the White House is not letting up on George McGovern. He is, so goes the official line, not only mean as well as smug but against Flag and country as well as President. The official line is set forth by one of Mr. Nixon's aides, Patrick J. Buchanan, in a special article written for the New York Times. It heralds a political season in which the badly beaten McGovern will be propped up by the White House to serve as whipping boy for the Democratic Party.

Buchanan called the McGovern campaign "just about the dirtiest and meanest" in the nation's history and buttresses his thesis by listing all the harsh things McGovern said about Nixon during the campaign.

The piece is an excellent job of what professional campaigners call "negative research", a euphemism for keeping track of all the dirty things the other fellow says about your man. "Negative research" is a necessary campaign chore, but it is a powerful weapon only when one side has slung a lot of mud and the other side has not.

Unfortunately for Mr. Buchanan's thesis, the 1972 campaign was not of that kind. True, Mr. Nixon did not really campaign. But Mr. Nixon's surrogates kept McGovern's negative research staff very busy indeed. Herewith, to straighten the record, is a small sample of things Republican campaigners said about McGovern. It would be interesting

to know whether Buchanan would judge them—as he judged McGovern's statements—"slanderous," "malicious" and "remorseless billingsgate."

Vice President Spiro Agnew: "McGovern advocates a philosophy of defeat and self-hate . . . he possesses an incandescent hunger for personal popularity . . . his factional truncated plans make him popular with sectors of North Vietnam society . . . He is a politician of the utmost expediency. You can't believe what he says . . . McGovern is one of the greatest frauds ever to be considered a presidential candidate by a major American party."

Republican National Chairman Sen. Robert Dole: "McGovern has engaged in personal acts of questionable morality."

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird: "McGovern's proposed defense budget is tantamount to a white flag of surrender . . . He is a spokesman for the enemy . . . He stands for unconditional surrender . . . He would sell out to communism the small nations of the world."

McGovern is no saint. But what if acolytes in the White House succeed in persuading history that the Nixon campaign of 1972 was without sin? The slander and contumely which Mr. Nixon's surrogates visited upon the character of George McGovern makes you wonder how Buchanan feels entitled to cast the first stone.