

Merry-Go-Round

Time to Clean Up Election System

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FROM ITT to Watergate, the great scandals of the past months have been outgrowths of the 1972 presidential campaign. They have left an odor that can be traced straight to the political fund-raising.

The taxpaying public could change our corrupt system of financing presidential elections with a flick of the pen. Yet only a dismayingly small 3 per cent have marked their income tax returns allotting \$1 for the 1976 presidential campaign.

The dollar won't be added to their taxes and, therefore, will cost them nothing. They can also specify which party they want to aid, or they can assign their dollar to a general political fund.

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HERE'S HOW the Republicans raised some of the money to reelect President Nixon:

- ITT wrote a check for \$100,000 and pledged up to \$400,000 to help finance the Republican Convention. This was barely a week after the Justice Department had settled ITT's antitrust troubles, which antitrust chief Richard McLaren earlier had sworn to fight all the way to the Supreme Court. ITT lobbyist Dita Beard, in a personal and confidential memo which we published, linked the \$400,000 pledge to the antitrust settlement.

- Penzoil president William Liedtke stuffed approximately \$700,000 in cash, checks and negotiable stock certificates

into a suitcase, which a Penzoil vice president carried aboard a company plane from Houston to Washington. He delivered the suitcase full of money to the Nixon Campaign Headquarters in the dark of night. No receipts were asked or given. Part of the cash was used to hire the burglary crew that broke into Democratic Party Headquarters to steal documents and bug the phones.

- Another \$200,000 in \$100 bills stuffed into a black attache case was delivered to the President's campaign chairman by a go-between. The attache case had been filled by financial tycoon Robert Vesco, who was in hot water with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Immediately afterward, former Attorney General John Mitchell arranged an appointment for Vesco with SEC chairman William Casey.

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AFTER these scandals made headlines, the Republicans with considerable squirming turned down the ITT offer and returned the donations to Vesco. But the President's top campaign aides would have kept the tainted money if there had been no bad publicity.

The checkoff system, we believe, is a better method of financing elections than private contributions. The presidential victor then would be indebted to the taxpayers, rather than to the special interests.