



A Bugging Bugs the GOP

MIAMI BEACH — A lot of Republicans are loath to get involved in premature victory celebrations.

A surprising number express a brooding uneasiness over that break-in and bugging of Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Apartments.

KEY REPUBLICANS say privately that the Watergate caper not only was dumb, but that the administration's handling of it has been "idiotic." There is an uneasy fear the administration will fiddle and stall, with disingenuous "explanations," and let some deeply embarrassing revelations pop out on the eve of the elections.

Republicans are as perplexed as everyone else by the so-called explanations of how a \$25,000 check intended for the Nixon reelection campaign wound up in the Miami bank account of one of the men arrested in that Watergate break-in.

Maurice Stans, Nixon's top fund-raiser, has maintained a haughty silence about how the check got from him to the burglary suspect. Stans is supposed to have told investigators that he gave the check to G. Gordon Liddy, former finance counsel for the Committee for the Reelection of the President, and that Liddy had it changed to cash before depositing it in the Nixon campaign fund.

But why would anyone change a cashier's check to cash before depositing it? And what did the burglary suspect, Bernard L. Barker, do to get the check into his account?

Liddy was fired after refusing to answer FBI questions about the matter. Now Clark MacGregor, Nixon's campaign manager, has come up with another inscrutable "explanation" of what "might" have gone on. MacGregor says Liddy was using campaign money, without authority, to check up on radicals who might disrupt the GOP national convention.

But even Republicans ask: Is this an implication that the then - chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Larry O'Brien, was thought to be in cahoots with the radicals? Would Liddy lose his job by refusing to talk to the FBI about radicals when the FBI, too, is out after the radicals who might represent a threat to the President? Surely Liddy had more to be quiet about than Jerry Rubin.

Republican uneasiness is intensified by the almost incredible request that a Democratic lawsuit against the Republicans growing out of the bugging incident be postponed until after the election. Republican lawyers claimed that airing the case before Nov. 7 would do "incalculable" damage to GOP campaign efforts.

MacGREGOR NOW SAYS, weeks later, that GOP lawyers asked for the postponement "without consulting us, and that was an error on their part."

Concerned Republicans know that there has been a host of errors all around, and that the costliest ones may be yet to come where this bugging affair is concerned.