

INVESTIGATIONS

The Watergate Taps

At first it seemed as if the five men who broke into the Democratic National Committee Headquarters in Washington last June were simply replaying the Marx Brothers at the opera—they had been caught in the act before any real harm could be done. Then it appeared that they had not only succeeded in bugging the headquarters, but had apparently been financed by \$114,000 in Republican campaign funds that had been “laundered” in Mexico and ac-

ording to the General Accounting Office, may not have been properly recorded under the new Federal Election Campaign Act. Two weeks ago, new evidence suggested that the Democratic headquarters office had been burglarized as well and that documents had been removed, photographed and replaced.

Larry O'Brien, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and now George McGovern's campaign chairman, made more charges last week. O'Brien claimed that not only his own telephone but that of one of his aides had been tapped and “monitored on a regular daily basis” for several weeks prior to the arrests. He said that logs were kept of his telephone conversations, and that those logs had then been written up into memos and circulated. He refused to elaborate about who received the surveillance memos, but, if he was correct, their existence would suggest that O'Brien's conversations were known to many people besides those on the receiving end of the monitoring equipment—possibly people high in the Republican ranks. And to whom was O'Brien talking in those weeks before the convention? “Perhaps every prominent Democrat in America,” said O'Brien—including all the presidential hopefuls. “My phone was tapped, my conversations overheard, my files invaded, my correspondence photographed.”

Scared Off. According to O'Brien, an investigation by his attorney, Edward Bennett Williams, disclosed that members of the Watergate Five had also tried to enter and place wiretaps in McGovern's Capitol Hill headquarters back on May 27, well before McGovern had been chosen as the Democratic nominee but long after he had established himself as a serious contender. That attempt failed, charged O'Brien, only because they were unexpectedly interrupted in the attempt and scared off.

In an effort to embarrass the Republicans further, O'Brien charged Attorney General Richard Kleindienst with “the most appalling foot dragging,” and added that Kleindienst seemed to treat the case “as some kind of joke.” Nevertheless, sources inside the Justice Department expect indictments to be handed down within the week. The seven to receive them will reportedly be the five arrested in the Watergate office building—James McCord, Bernard Barker, Frank Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez and Virgilio Gonzales—plus former White House Aide G. Gordon Liddy and former White House Consultant E. Howard Hunt. Evidence reportedly linked Liddy to the monitoring of the microphones planted in the Democratic offices and Hunt to the purchase of electronic bugs.

The indictments will in effect stifle the Democrats' charges, because they will imply that the case has been “broken” and that the responsibility for the



LARRY O'BRIEN AT PRESS CONFERENCE
Monitored on a regular basis.

electronic surveillance of the Democrats went no higher than the middle echelons of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. What the Democrats desperately want to find is some connection with those closer to Nixon.

To help them to that end, Democrats have hired Walter Sheridan, a former Justice Department investigator, to pursue his own study of the case. Sheridan, who played a key role in developing the evidence that sent former Teamster Boss James Hoffa to prison, apparently gave O'Brien the specific leads he needed to make his claims about the tapping of the two phones in his former office. Meanwhile, Williams has filed a request to take depositions from 17 more people in O'Brien's \$1,000,000 violation-of-civil-rights suit against, among others, the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Republican National Committee Chairman Robert Dole has berated the Democrats for adopting “guilt-by-deposition” tactics.

Foreign Enemy. Even if the investigations unearth nothing else, the Democrats already seem to have considerable political ammunition. At week's end McGovern squeezed off a few rhetorical rounds of his own. “What first looked like a caper now appears to be a central part of the Republican strategy,” he said. “It now appears that the headquarters of one of the two major political parties of the United States was treated as if it were the headquarters of a foreign enemy.” What remained quite unclear was how much the scandal could help to narrow the huge Republican lead. Said a top McGovern aide: “These are serious enough charges to determine the course of a presidential campaign in a normal year, but this is not a normal year.”