

Stupid Watergate Capers

WASHINGTON — To anyone who has spent much time close to the center of a campaign, the so-called Watergate caper is a puzzlement.

Like Inspector Maigret, one looks first for the motive. Why bug Larry O'Brien's office? Everything that occurs inside the Democratic National Committee is public knowledge within about half an hour, and if anybody thinks that the real deals would take place there, he needs a good course in politics.

THE SERIOUS stuff is discussed in a Senate "hide-away," or in a living room in Chevy Chase, or even on the golf links.

Thus, for openers, it would seem that whoever laid this one on had an IQ problem. Now whatever you may think about President Nixon's other dimensions, one thing he does not have is an IQ problem.

Moreover, if Mr. Nixon has "Hitlerian" tendencies (as some Democrats have absurdly suggested), the bugging would have been a real professional job — it would never have been turned over to that crew of incompetents. In short, I believe that the President was as shocked as the rest of us and I believe in his personal innocence.

However, as the head of his party, Mr. Nixon has a professional obligation to keep his troops in line, and here — I suspect — is where the real problem arose. Partly this is because the Republicans have so much money they don't know what to do with it, and money draws marginal characters into

politics like a massive magnet.

In 1964, when we Democrats were wallowing in green stuff, not a day passed without a dozen characters turning up with "projects," and there were always empire builders in the Democratic organization willing at least to listen.

Somehow or other, for example, we used to get advance texts of Senator Goldwater's key speeches. The consequence of this was that before Goldwater had even opened his mouth, we had five speakers primed to reply. Maybe he sent them over as a courtesy, but all I know is that when I innocently inquired how we got them, the reply was, "Don't ask."

Going back to 1960, in both the primaries and the general election the late Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. had an intelligence network that put the FBI to shame.

THERE IS, unfortunately, a pretty obscure line between political intelligence operations and certain provisions of the criminal code.

Admittedly burglary and wire-tapping are well on the other side of the line, but the principle involved needs a lot of clarification.

As I said, I'm certain that the President knew nothing about the business, but his campaign staff seems to have recruited some pretty strange characters.

It is certainly his responsibility to clean house.