

Bugging, Fund Charges Leave Public Apathetic

By Louis Harris

Neither the Watergate bugging affair nor Democratic charges that the Republicans have a \$10 million secret fund from "big business" has made much dent in this election. A majority of 57 per cent agree with the statement that the GOP campaign fund matter is "mostly politics" and an even higher 62 per cent dismiss the Watergate episode on the same ground.

The Watergate episode, has been a major plank in Sen. McGovern's contention that "corruption has been rife in the Nixon administration." In-depth questioning on the subject among 1,585 likely voters earlier this month yielded this set of public perceptions of the Watergate issue:

- A substantial 76 per cent of the voters reported they had followed the events in the case. By 70-13 per cent, a big majority perceived the wiretapping of Democratic headquarters as a case of "political spying." By an even more lopsided 84-9 per cent, voters also agreed with the statement that it is a "basic violation of civil liberties and individual freedom to put wiretaps in the opposition party's headquarters."

- However, by 50-25 per cent, the voters did not feel that "White House aides ordered the bugging." By an even more substantial 66-16 per cent, nearly two in every three voters also did not believe that "President Nixon was involved in or had knowledge of the Watergate affair."

- And by a substantial 62-26 per cent, most voters said they were not worried about the civil liberties aspects of the bugging, since "it is mostly politics." And by 57-25 per cent, another majority believe that such "political spying" is a "common occurrence" in politics, especially around campaign time.

As for the Democratic charge that the "Republicans are hiding \$10 million in campaign contributions, mostly from big business, given in return for favors from the Nixon administration," only 18 per cent of the voters give credence to it. Another 9 per cent of the voters go along with the Re-

publican answer: that these gifts were given before the April cutoff date, only after had to be legally reported, which names of contributors

A much larger 57 per cent of the electorate agrees with the description of the controversy over campaign contributions as "mostly politics." When probed to find out why they feel this way, a substantial 34 per cent of the voters answered that, "these are the same kind of charges that come up in every election and it is just the usual mud-throwing that goes on." Another 12 per cent believe the "Democrats take the same kind of money, or would if they had the chance."

On the money question, 30 per cent of the voters feel the Republican have an unfair advantage over the Democrats on funds available during the campaign. Only 4 per cent feel the Democrats have a money advantage over the Republicans. The largest single body of voter opinion, 47 per cent, feel neither side has an "unfair money advantage over the other."

It is true that the period the country is living through has been marked by widespread alienation on the part of voters—directed against the leadership in politics and government, as well as the established institutions in science, education and the military.

Voters are already so dubious of the men running the establishment in America today that they are not surprised by charges such as those which have surfaced in the Watergate or Republican fund matters.

A second context, however, involves the realities of politics—particularly the matter of political tactics and timing. The McGovern charges against the Nixon administration concerning corruption and political spying were not launched until well into the political year.

An old axiom of politics is that any development a year before the campaign begins is worth many times issues which are brought out in the heat of the campaign. The latter usually requires extraordinary voltage to produce shock waves.