

Political Sabotage, a Murky Tradition Stretching Far Back From Watergate

By ANTHONY RIPLEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 22—The fake letter, the political spy, the smear, the twisted fact, the theft of documents, the malicious prank, the sabotage of an opponent's campaign—almost all are as old as American government itself.

On occasion such tactics are carried out lightly with a deft touch of humor. Sometimes they lead to deep political embarrassment. But they also have shaken elections, defeated Presidential candidates and driven famous public figures into bitter retirement.

One of the most bizarre incidents in the long history of political espionage came to light in the early hours of June 17 when the Washington police arrested five men inside the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex. The men were wearing rubber gloves. Electronic bugging devices and copying cameras were found.

The incident has focused public attention on the murky area of dirty politics more than any single event in recent years.

"Negative research" is a standard practice of digging up every damaging fact, personal and public, about a political opponent. If it is too unsavory for news releases and speeches, it can be leaked to reporters on an unofficial basis.

Standard Equipment

For years spies have been a standard part of political campaigning. They have been recruited and sent off to the enemy camp to forage for information and report back. By its nature, spying involves theft and prying into secrets.

One veteran of perhaps a dozen modern campaigns recently observed:

"Planting amateurs is pretty widespread and generally unproductive. It is mostly a lark. It was not a formalized intelligence thing in the past. There have been more wire-taps in the last 15 years—some reported, some not.

"Frequently people will pose as reporters from some small newspaper, trail along after the candidate and feed back what he is saying.

"But the place you're most effective is personal and private investigation of a guy's background."

Discovering an opponent's plans is "part of the political

game," according to Samuel J. Archibald, executive director of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee in Washington.

This year, he said, a record number of complaints of unfair practices have been received. He noted that the Democratic National Committee had not formally complained about the Watergate bugging incident.

The line that sets off dirty politics from ethical politics is often hard to find, Mr. Archibald said. His committee draws no such line. It only persuades political parties to sign a code of fair practice, publicizes complaints, arranges for arbitration and then lets the public decide.

"We serve as a forum to ventilate the issue," Mr. Archibald said.

One of the few studies on the subject, a book called simply "Dirty Politics," was published in 1966 and written by Bruce L. Felknor, who headed the committee and is now a marketing executive in Chicago.

Mr. Felknor discusses what he sees as the emergence of a new type of cold-blooded professional election manipulator. "He comes to politics in the role of hired killer," Mr. Felknor wrote.

"The old-time smear artist is disappearing slowly," Mr. Felknor observed, "as the electorate becomes more literate and as the news media expose chicanery more fully and rapidly. He is being replaced by a different phenomenon and a more frightening one. This is a new wave of amoral political technicians who are clever, indefatigable, poisonous and brilliant."

In a telephone interview recently the author commented:

"The bloodless precision of what seems to be going on this year is a bit jarring. As far as I know it is unprecedented in American politics.

"I don't think by any means it is a monopoly of the Republican National Committee and its minions. I think there are plenty of Democrats and quite liberal Democrats whose entourages include these guys who bring a kind of amoral sterility to the problem of winning elections."

Asked about the Watergate bugging incident, he added:

"The guys who did the Watergate caper and all they represent are not so much of the bloodless scientists [of electioneering], but people of the gumshoe mentality like a house dick in a cheap hotel."

Many Precedents in History
American electoral history is rich with examples of thievery, document forgery, name-calling and other practices that follow the uncertain line of dirty politics and

sometimes fall over into the mud.

Though Gen. George Washington was selected unanimously as the first President by the Electoral College in 1789 and went into office to thunderous cheers and booming cannons, he left eight years later with Tom Paine calling him "treacherous in private friendship and a hypocrite in public life."

The name-calling was so bitter and widespread that Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott wrote that it would debase the character of an angel.

In the campaign of 1800, Aaron Burr intercepted a secret pamphlet written by Alexander Hamilton while it was still at the printers and gave it to the newspapers, thereby scuttling Mr. Hamilton's efforts to have the Federalist electors cast their votes for Charles C. Pinckney.

In the election of 1828, described by historians as one of the worst in history, the President, John Quincy Adams, was charged with extravagance, corruption and even with sending a young woman to seduce the Russian Czar to sway his political opinion.

His opponent, Andrew Jackson, had to face the kinds of charges that were later hurled against Abraham Lincoln. Jackson was called a thief, liar, adulterer, drunkard, gambler, murderer and more.

Forgery in 1884

In the election of 1844, portions of a journal by a fictitious "Baron Roorback" was published by The Chronicle, a newspaper in Ithaca, N. Y., just before Election Day and too late to be answered. It described the Baron watching 43 slaves being sold to the Democratic Presidential candidate, James K. Polk and branded with a hot iron. It was picked up by other newspapers who supported the Whig candidate, Henry Clay. It was a total fabrication.

Democrats in the election of 1880 forged the name of the Republican candidate, James A. Garfield, to a letter favoring importation of Chinese labor to California.

Grover Cleveland, the Democratic candidate in 1884, was accused of fathering an illegitimate child, and the Republicans chanted during the campaign, "Ma, ma, where's my pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha."

When he ran for re-election four years later, President Cleveland was hurt by a letter cooked up by George A. Osgoodby, a Republican, who wrote the British Ambassador, Sir Lionel Sackville-West, asking him how he should vote to help England. The letter was signed "Charles F. Murchison" and

the Ambassador recommended President Cleveland.

The letter was made public two weeks before Election Day, and according to some historians, cost Mr. Cleveland the New York City Irish vote and with it, the election.

Charles Evans Hughes, the Republican candidate, was pictured as a friend of Germany's during Woodrow Wilson's election in 1916. And in 1928, Alfred E. Smith was assailed because of his Catholicism, although Herbert C. Hoover, the Republican candidate, denounced such tactics.

During Mr. Smith's campaign, a Republican prankster turned up the heat in a building in Louisville, Ky., where the Democrat was speaking.

"Half way through his speech, he was sweating so copiously that he seemed half-drowned," wrote H. L. Mencken who attended the rally.

After the stormy years of Franklin D. Roosevelt in which those who hated him poured out one vilification after another, "A Communism" charge became fashionable and words like "treason" were heard in the land, denouncing both Presidents and candidates.

In one of the classic composite photographs of American political history, Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland was shown with a Communist leader, Earl Browder. This was done by gluing a 1938 picture of the Senator to a 1950 picture of Mr. Browder.

A new breed of image politics and political manipulators seemed to first emerge in the 1960 elections. While the Democrats, John F. Kennedy and the Republican Richard M. Nixon, took the high road, a few of their followers slugged it out in the dirt.

Mr. Nixon was described to segregationist whites in the South as a friend of blacks; and to blacks, he was described as a bigot—in separate mailings. Mr. Kennedy's Catholicism was attacked, and his father was labeled a whisky baron.

"By Election Day," Mr. Felknor wrote, "both members of each ticket were depicted to Jews as anti-Semites and to anti-Semites as Jew-lovers."

In the 1964 campaign Dick Tuck, long an active political prankster for the Democratic party, put a young woman aboard Senator Barry Goldwater's campaign train where she slipped humorous anti-Goldwater leaflets under reporters' doors until she was caught and put off the train.

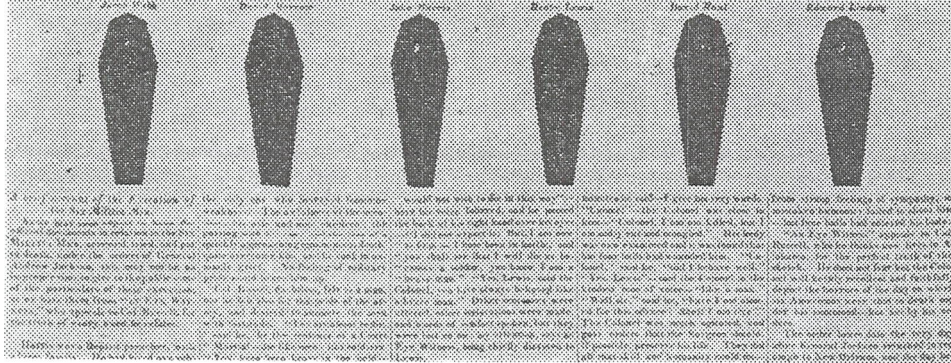
In the present campaign, Senator Edmund S. Muskie's backers have listed nine possible incidents of espionage and sabotage. They included bogus mailings, stolen polling data, a fake letter to the editor of a New Hampshire newspaper, reports of spies, copied campaign plans and "funny phones," which suggested the possibility of wire-taps.

Clark MacGregor, President Nixon's campaign director, has listed incidents of vandalism and arson against Republican offices across the nation and four incidents of "irregularities" involving possible spies and infiltration.

Senator George McGov-

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Some Account of some of the Bloody Deeds OF GENERAL JACKSON.



This handbill was circulated by allies of John Quincy Adams in his campaign against Andrew Jackson in 1828. It charged that six militiamen were executed for desertion in the War of 1812 with Jackson's consent.

ern's aides have listed 10 such incidents.

Sid Davidoff, a former aide to Mayor Lindsay of New York, still chuckles over one of the incidents in the Florida primary campaign when eight anethesized live chickens were smuggled into a dinner for Gov. George C. Wallace.

Mayor Lindsay had been challenging Governor Wallace to a debate and the Governor had refused.

As the chickens revived, they went scurrying through the hall bearing signs that read, "I'm George Wallace and I'm afraid to debate."

Mr. Davidoff added with a touch of sadness, "Some guys were badly beaten up."

For simplicity and effectiveness, one of the tricks of Mayor James M. Curley of Boston still stands out. He would find out the telephone number of his opponent's campaign headquarters and then run an advertisement in the classified section of the Boston newspapers. It read: "Late model Cadillac, must sacrifice, excellent condition, \$1,000"—and then the phone number was listed.



In 1884, Republicans made public that Grover Cleveland had fathered an illegitimate son when he was a bachelor.



This photograph, circulated during the 1950 Senatorial race in Maryland, suggested that Millard Tydings, at right, associated with Earl Browder, a Communist leader. It proved to be a composite of a 1938 picture of Mr. Browder and a 1950 photo of Senator Tydings.