

Victor Lasky

The Campaign Bugs Before Watergate

Washington

THE OSTENSIBLE purpose of the forthcoming Senate investigation into the Watergate case is to determine whether new legislation might be needed to protect the electoral process by which the President of the United States is chosen.



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But, for some reason, the Democratic-controlled Senate has refused to sanction a broadening of the investigation to include the campaigns of 1964 and 1968 in which there have been allegations of shenanigans directed against the Republican candidates.

Noting this, Senator John Tower (Rep-Tex.) has observed that "less is known about what happened during those campaigns than what happened during the 1972

campaign with respect to electronic surveillance. There have been strong indications and evidence and assertions by people in responsible places that there was, indeed, electronic eavesdropping in those two campaigns..."

And, indeed, there was. Barry Goldwater has publicly stated that during his 1964 presidential race his own Washington apartment was "bugged" by parties unknown. The Arizona Republican himself discovered the "bug."

In 1968, Senator Hugh Scott reported, there were similar episodes of electronic hanky-panky directed at the Republicans.

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BUT, BY AND LARGE, the media have shown a massive disinterest in these Republican contentions. However, when the Watergate case broke, certain newspapers and TV networks went overboard to keep the story alive, rehashing the facts almost daily in an obvious effort to embarrass the White House.

They did succeed in promoting a half-million-dollar Senate probe headed by Sam L. Ervin Jr., the esteemed North Carolina Democrat. Nevertheless, it can safely be predicted that, as far as Watergate is concerned, the revelations will be few and far between. The case, after being tried in the newspapers as well as a courtroom, is pretty much a squeezed-out lemon.

The Ervin probers, however, will also look into charges of political sabotage attributed to Donald H. Segretti, a young California lawyer who allegedly received Republican campaign funds. The sabotage allegedly was directed at Democratic candidates vying against each other in last spring's primaries.

Exactly what Segretti did for his money has not been fully developed. From what this reporter has been able to gather, he was pretty much a bumbling amateur who may have been responsible for a few harmless pranks.

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BEING AN eminently fair man, Senator Ervin will probably not concentrate on what Republicans did to Democrats. When the facts are called to his attention, he may well look into what Democrats did to Democrats — most notably what George McGovern's paid aide, Dick Tuck, did to Edmund Muskie.

Unlike Segretti, Dick Tuck is a self-styled professional political prankster. His favorite target over the years has been Richard Nixon.

According to Paul Hoffman in the Village Voice, Tuck turned up on McGovern's staff last year.

"During the New Hampshire primary," Hoffman reported, (Tuck) played a few harmless jokes on Edmund Muskie, such as slipping McGovern stickers into the bottom of the cups used at one of the Maine senator's kaffee-klatsches.

"After Watergate, though, Tuck and his antics were shelved."

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IF TUCK'S antics were so "harmless," why were they "shelved" after Watergate? And what were the other "jokes" played on Muskie? Were they pranks which some newspapers have laid at the door of the Republicans?

Tuck could make a most informative witness before the Ervin committee — that is, if he's ever called to testify.

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