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Millionaires in Coast Club Ardent as Ever for Nixon

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NEWPORT BEACH, Calif., June 18 — The Watergate scandal has produced very few misgivings among the yacht-racing race-horse-owning millionaires of Orange County's Lincoln Club, who like to boast that without their help Richard M. Nixon could never have become President.

Whatever the opinion polls may say about the President's loss of popularity in the wake of the Watergate disclosures, the Lincoln Club's affection for him remains as ardent as ever.

"He's one of the greatest men of the century and no evidence whatever has been produced to blemish that fact," said Robert F. Beaver, who heads a large construction company in this seaside community of wealthy Republican conservatism.

Mr. Beaver is the Lincoln Club's treasurer, to whom 126 men chosen for their social acceptability as well as their financial affluence pay \$500 a year for the distinction of being numbered among Southern California's Republican elite.

Members of the Lincoln Club have contributed millions of dollars to promote Mr. Nixon's political fortunes, some as far back as 1946, when he first ran for Congress from this area. But their large donations are always independent of the club's treasury, whose audits regularly show only relatively modest expenditures in behalf of state and local candidates.

Senate Hearings Assailed

Interviews with a dozen officers and members of the Lincoln Club produced strong criticism and a sprinkling of colorful epithets for the current Senate committee hearings on Watergate.

One termed the hearings an effort to "make a mountain out of a tiny molehill," another was reminded of "an old Keystone cop comedy" and a multi-millionaire personal friend of the President called them "childish and absurd, a bunch of kids making mud pies."

Many of the club members appeared to find nothing shocking, or even ethically questionable, in the disclosures of political espionage, bugging and burglary and efforts to disguise those activities with an overlay of campaign cash.

A member of the club's own board of directors, Herbert W. Kalmbach, formerly Mr. Nixon's personal attorney, has admitted handling large amounts of the covert funds to obtain lawyers and otherwise provide for the Water-

gate burglars and finance other espionage activities.

Mr. Kalmbach's acknowledged role in the Watergate cover-up seemed to be a matter of scant worry to his Lincoln Club colleagues.

They either subscribed to the statement of the club secretary, Paul A. Palmer, that the Newport Beach lawyer was "a man of the highest integrity and ideals in whom we have complete faith," or they sought to minimize his association with the club.

Dr. Arnold O. Beckman, one of the club's founders in 1959, said that Mr. Kalmbach's role in the Lincoln Club "has been greatly exaggerated—he has never been particularly active and we haven't seen much of him lately."

Espionage Called Routine

In discussing political espionage, most of the club members took an attitude that one referred to as hard-headed pragmatism—that the Republican national campaign staff was only doing what came naturally.

Similar practices, they said, had been going in for years in both parties. They described these activities as an accepted, built-in part of the American political system and said it was therefore ridiculous for the public to become angered.

"Anyone would have to be extremely naive to think that this sort of thing hasn't been going on for a long time," said Dr. Beckman, 73-year-old founder of Beckman Instruments, Inc., of Fullerton.

"Political espionage is as American as apple pie," said Mr. Beaver. "And I have to see where the American people have been hurt in anyway."

Several of those interviewed stressed and seemed to regard as a mitigating circumstance, that none of those linked to the Watergate affair had been shown to have profited personally from the covert use of campaign cash.

The club's new president, John S. Fluor, an industrialist, seemed somewhat more concerned about the affects of Watergate than many of his colleagues. He referred to the case as a "disgrace" that was hurting the nation and expressed the hope that "this thing will soon get finished, straightened up."

Most club members who discussed the Watergate affair seemed more concerned about the amount of money collected by the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President than they were in how the money was spent.