

Mugging-Deluxe Style

To somebody in the rowdy daily press it is fascinating to find Fortune magazine, the board room Playboy, wrinkling its nose and drawing its skirts aside from a recumbent Richard Nixon, for all the world in the manner of a fine lady spurning a fallen drunk.

But it is educational, too. Lest anybody think Watergate And All That were of Big Business' doing, Fortune reminds us there's a difference between a victim and an accomplice. All those loose \$100 bills which the Nixon men were stuffing here and there, Fortune says, were less an outpouring of corporate generosity than the proceeds of a high level mugging.

"Extortion!" cries Fortune, with the comment:

"The fund-raising tactics used in the Nixon campaign smacked of a Mafia-style shakedown of the nation's leading business enterprises."

With this kind of editorializing in the distinguished journal of commerce and industry, you begin to wonder whether Nixon had not better resign after all: He hasn't a substantial area of support left.

Here in California we have already noted how the unsubtle Nixon fund-raisers left the Republican Party's money sources bruised and wounded and in an unforgiving mood. Candidates for state and local office, who inherited the rifled cash box and a bundle of old campaign posters, have been wondering where they're going to get the scratch to run.

A penniless politician is a hateful politician, so it's not likely Nixon will find many defenders among the erstwhile faithful in California.

The Nixon money-finders went through the state the way Federal cavalry finally beat up the Shenandoah Valley, which was picked so clean, they used to say, that a crow flying over the valley had to carry his own lunch.

Still, there was the impression that although arms were twisted, this was pleadingly done, urgently done, done as though in response to The Leader's great need.

But Fortune's editorial ("Extortion!") more than hints that where the Nixies went a-gathering they did so with knives and staves, so to speak. Fortune quotes George Spater, who got browbeaten into making an

illegal \$55,000 contribution to the Nixon campaign:

"A large part of the money raised from the business community for political purposes is given in fear of what would happen if it were not given."

Extortion. I would much like to hear Spater enlarge on that theme, with details. He is no marginal sweatshop operator in fear and trembling of the tossed bomb. Spater is chairman of the board of American Airlines.

One of the dirty jokes of the dirty Nixon campaign, accompanied as it was by that vigorous fund-raising, is that the campaign literally had money to burn. The Republicans are quarreling a bit right now, in as seemly a fashion as they can manage, over who gets custody of the surplus.

Fortune, bravely enough, hopes that tightened campaign contribution law will protect businessmen in the future from the terror tactics they evidently endured at the hands of the Nixies. The magazine also suggests that when politicians are successfully restrained from soliciting, businessmen had better quit offering. It's a two-sided game, is political fund raising, and a dangerous one, Fortune warns.

Here in the parish we have all been wondering what our own campaign spending limitations, newly enacted, will do to the long established power structure. How much of the Big Money political activity here was what Fortune calls extortion, how much was a voluntary buy-in? Maybe we shall see.

I have scanned a list or two of political contributors, and it is astonishing what an inbred bunch these money people are, and how consistent is the pattern of their giving.

The Ben Swig technique, that of gathering the money men for a big luncheon meeting, then locking the doors (playfully, of course) until the pledges are all made, has almost become a San Francisco tradition.

We're moving toward still tighter restrictions, still broader disclosures. One of these days we may see here, as Fortune hopes to see nationally, a cleaner relationship between business and politics — on both sides.