

IRS Studying Files Of Democrat's Chief



Jack Anderson

THE Internal Revenue Service, which has made life miserable for Democratic National Chairman Larry O'Brien with its audits of his taxes, has now moved against his successor, the hard-working Robert Strauss.

Strauss, a wealthy, outspoken Texan who is now rallying the Democrats for a fight against the Republicans in the 1974 and 1976 elections, became the subject of an IRS examination about a month ago.

Though sure his taxes are in order, Strauss told his accountants to cooperate with the tax agents. We have learned they are studying the Strauss returns for 1970, 1971 and 1972. The IRS office in Dallas is handling the examination, but Democratic friends of Strauss feel it was approved, if not instigated, in Washington.

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COMING as it does at the same time that the IRS is probing 1968 standard-bearer Hubert Humphrey's finances, these Democrats remain unconvinced that the Strauss probe is nonpolitical.

They point to testimony in the Watergate case that the White House repeatedly tried to use the IRS as a political weapon. Now that the administration can safely cite ex-Vice President Spiro Agnew as evidence of nonpartisanship in the IRS, the Democrats are fearful they will once again become fair game.

Humphrey's trouble with the tax men, for example, has come over testimony by a Howard Hughes emissary that he delivered \$50,000 in cash to Humphrey in 1968. But the Minnesota Senator has told us it is his returns for 1970, 1971 and 1972 that the IRS seems most interested in. Meanwhile, the White House has said President Nixon is "confident" that his crony, C. G. "Bebe" Rebozo, "acted in a proper fashion" in accepting a \$100,000 cash "contribution" for Mr. Nixon from billionaire Howard Hughes.

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STRAUSS, while no more happy than any other American to have the IRS in his files, has taken the view that the administration is innocent of political hatchetwork unless proven different.

"It is a fact that the IRS has been working with my accountant concerning the last few years," Strauss told us. "So far as I know the inquiry is routine. My accountant says the tax returns are in good order. There is no reason to suspect political motives at this time."

At the IRS, a spokesman refused even to acknowledge the probe of Strauss' returns, much less to comment on whether it was instigated or approved by Washington.

This column was written under the direction of Les Whitten of Jack Anderson's staff.