

McGovern's Mail Volume Monitored

By Jack Anderson

The Postal Service apparently provided President Nixon with a confidential count of the volume of mail going into the headquarters of his Democratic opponent, Sen. George McGovern, during the last two months of the 1972 campaign.

With these figures, a direct-mail expert could determine the response, and even estimate the dollar figure, McGovern was getting from his fund-raising drive.

The Democratic presidential candidate raised most of his campaign funds through mail solicitation. The contributions went through Washington's 20th Street post office.

We have now learned that the Postal Service on Sept. 5, 1972, began tabulating the volume of mail moving through the post office to McGovern's headquarters. This unusual mail count continued until Nov. 9, two days after the election.

The President appeared to be asking about this mail count on Sept. 15, 1972, according to the White House transcripts. He asked his counsel John Dean about "watching . . . McGovern contributors." Dean assured the President that "we've got a hawk's eye on that."

A moment later, the President mused: "I don't think he is getting a hell of a lot of small

money. I don't think so. I don't believe this crap." Then he turned to his staff chief, H. R. Haldeman. "Have you had this post office checky yet?" Nixon inquired.

"That John was going to do," Haldeman replied. "I don't know."

The transcript doesn't show whether the President ever received the report on McGovern's mail. We have established only that a count was made.

The Postal Service also kept count of the mail going to President Nixon's campaign headquarters during the same two-month period. Our sources suggest, however, this may have been a camouflage. If only McGovern's mail had been counted, the sources pointed out, postal workers sympathetic to McGovern might have become suspicious and tipped off McGovern about the meddling with his mail.

A supervisor at the 20th Street station gave a lame explanation of the mail-volume checks. He kept track of the campaign mail, he said, so he could plot future manpower needs. But the volume of mail generated by a presidential campaign, of course, wouldn't be duplicated for another four years.

The present 20th Street postmaster offered a conflicting but more plausible excuse. He said the volume figures were kept to

protect the Postal Service from possible complaints. The White House did not respond to our requests for comment.

Meanwhile, Sen. McGovern is encountering echoes of 1972 in his fight for re-election to the Senate. The same false charges of cowardice that McGovern thought were laid to rest in 1972 have now been revived in his Senate campaign.

His opponent is a conservative former Air Force lieutenant colonel and Vietnam prisoner named Leo Thorsness. One of his first moves was to bring in an out-of-state consultant, Lyn Nofziger, who was a member of the White House "dirty tricks" team in 1972.

The veteran, able Nofziger was given \$10,000, for example, to try to keep George Wallace off the California ballot in 1972. At least \$1,200 of this money was distributed to American Nazi stormtroopers, although Nofziger claims it was without his knowledge.

Earlier, Nofziger, as an aide to California's Gov. Ronald Reagan, leaked information to the press about the homosexual activities of two liberal Reagan colleagues.

Now, scurrilous cards on McGovern's alleged cowardice in World War II are turning up in South Dakota. These quoted from a discredited John Birch Society article which claims Mc-

Govern, as a bomber pilot, refused to continue on a mission and his plane was flown back by a co-pilot. Actually, McGovern was a decorated war hero.

During the 1972 campaign, John Dean arranged for a contact to snoop into McGovern's service record to check out the cowardice story. But Dean was obliged to report to Haldeman in a confidential memo dated June 16, 1972:

"The party reviewing the file (advised) that there is nothing in McGovern's file which directly substantiates the allegation about his 'cowardice.' On the contrary, Dean wrote that the records showed 'the citations for McGovern's decorations, including his Distinguished Flying Cross, and reflects his various promotions during his military career.'"

There is no reason to believe that Leo Thorsness, a man of solid integrity, has had anything to do with distributing the cowardice cards. A spokesman said: "We don't want that kind of stuff around here."

Nofziger also denounced the distribution of the false charge as "crap." In Memphis, pamphleteer John W. Biggert, who printed the cards, said he had produced tens of thousands of cards in 1972. The South Dakota distribution, he said; was either from an old printing or were reproductions.

© 1974, United Feature Syndicate