

Vote-Stealing Old Story in Chicago's Elections

BY WILLIAM CURRIE

Vote fraud is an old story in Chicago. Only the names change when exposing the guilty.

Currently, the Democrats are the suspected vote stealers. A half century ago, Republican precinct workers sponsored by Mayor William H. Thompson were being hauled into the courts to face charges resulting from their overzealous campaign strategies.

Year after year, decade after decade, few elections go by without some indictments resulting from fraud charges against precinct captains or election judges.

This Year No Different

This election year has been no different. Just two weeks ago, 14 poll judges were accused of tampering with the results of a special aldermanic election in the 7th Ward.

The current Tribune expose of election irregularities began last March when Tribune reporters and Better Government Association investigators were assigned to work as judges and poll watchers in precinct polling places on the day of the primary election.

Their information of voting irregularities that day was

turned over to the office of the county state's attorney. Later, reporters and investigators testified before a special grand jury which several weeks ago returned indictments against 18 election judges and precinct captains.

More Indictments Made

Following the primary, the Tribune received additional information concerning ghost voters. That information resulted in three more indictments handed down Wednesday by the county grand jury. Then last Friday, a federal grand jury returned 12 vote fraud indictments involving 40 persons. The grand jury investigation centered on Tribune Task Force disclosures of dozens of cases of vote fraud.

The most celebrated of recent election fraud scandals followed the 1960 election by a narrow margin of President John F. Kennedy.

A record total of 662 election officials found themselves under indictment charged with not only stealing single votes but the Presidency itself. Republicans tried desperately to prove that the number of votes stolen would have tipped the scales in favor of Nixon.

The trials dragged on for months to a sputtering succes-

sion of dismissals on technical grounds.

The culprits have not always gone free. During this century, hundreds have been convicted and sentenced for tampering with votes, tho the sentences have rarely been more than a matter of months.

A coalition of mobsters and politicians in the 1920s and '30s developed vote-stealing in the notorious river wards to a fine art. But in the 1940s, the gangsters took control and so outraged the business community with their crude tactics that citizens' watchdog groups came on the scene.

The Results the Same

They have prowled the polling places since. In the last decade it has been the Republican Operation Eagle Eye which has gained much experience, frustration, and little results for its efforts.

The props and the tricks of vote-stealing have changed from year to year. It probably began with ballot box-stuffing. Then came tricks called short-penciling, stub-penciling, magic barrel, chain-voting, and finally machine-tampering.

There have been all sorts of names for the tricks and devices, but they all boil down to one thing—fraud.