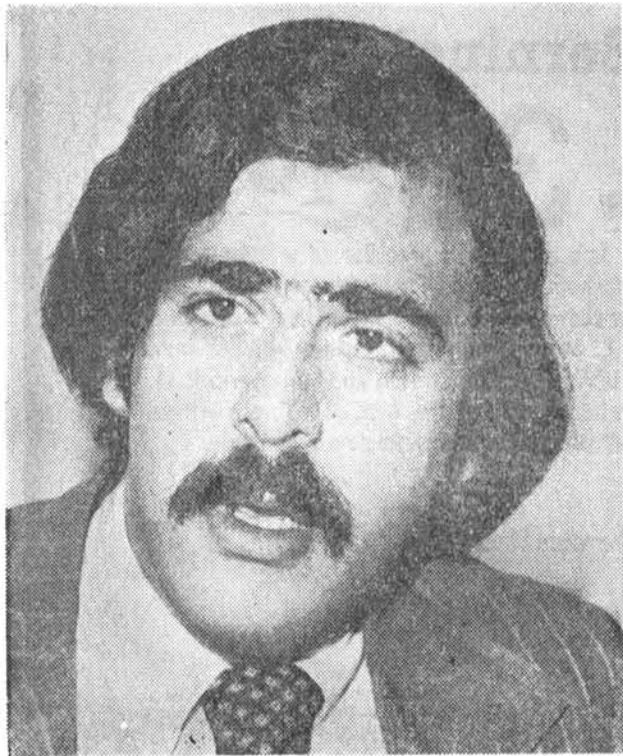


# Ervin staffer fears a Watergate likely in Canada



—AP photo

McGILL LAW STUDENT STEPHEN LEOPOLD  
Watergate "could easily happen in Canada"

Special to The Star

WASHINGTON — When Stephen Leopold tells stories of Quebec politics to his colleagues on Senator Sam Ervin's Watergate committee staff, the Americans are "flabbergasted," he says.

And after five weeks of delving into Watergate's scandalous details, Leopold, McGill University law student, has come to at least one conclusion: It could easily happen in Canada.

"In fact," he told The Star, "the possibilities of it happening in Canada—and not being uncovered—are even greater than they are here in the United States."

When the Watergate committee winds up its business, Leopold says he'll return to Montreal determined to help plug some of the loopholes he feels are almost an open invitation to similar scandal.

"I'll have a certain expertise," he says. "Maybe I'll be able to sniff out certain things myself."

In the meantime, there's plenty to do as an investigator for the Ervin committee, interviewing witnesses, poring over documents

and trying to either tear down or corroborate the sometimes contradictory testimony.

Leopold got the job simply by writing and offering his services. To his surprise, the committee took him up on the offer and he abruptly cancelled a summer hike around the United States and headed for Washington.

Now he's the committee's "resident Canuck" with a hand-painted maple leaf on his office door.

As he sifts through the sordid details of Watergate Leopold says he's "horrified" by such weaknesses in Canadian politics as the lack of a disclosure law covering campaign contributions.

In Canada, political candidates are only obligated to make public how much money they spend getting elected. There is no requirement whatever for them to disclose where the money came from.

Leopold says Canada should adopt the type of campaign disclosure law the Ervin committee is expected to recommend—total disclosure of all contributions and a ban on all campaign gifts deliv-

ered in hard-to-trace cash.

He believes the type of election corruption that became a legend in Quebec during the Duplessis years—"vote early and vote often"—makes Watergate "almost pale in comparison."

Even today, he says, the Montreal municipal administration of Jean Drapeau represents a far more authoritarian rule than the notorious Chicago government of Mayor Richard Daley.

Probably the biggest factor preventing wholesale political scandal in Canadian elections, Leopold believes, is "a greater respect for custom and tradition than there is in the United States. Because of this, many things that have to be written into black and white in the U.S. don't have to be in Canada."

But, he says, it's a "tenuous" protection against corruption and abuse.

On the other hand, Leopold says there's no doubt that if cabinet members in Canada had been accused of similar offences to the allegations against former Nixon cabinet members, the government would undoubtedly have fallen.