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Will Somebody Please Stand Up

Quite a few somebodies in this town have a secret and the older that secret becomes, the more it discredits the political process in this country in a year when that process desperately needs more credibility, not less. The secret involves the Watergate caper, the bugging of the offices of the Democratic National Committee, \$114,000 in the bank account of one of the suspects in that caper, the connection—if any—of a special Counsel to the President in the whole affair, and the ear shattering silence on the subject of high present and former members of the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The case is complex and much about it remains unknown, but its outlines are fairly simple. On June 17, five men were arrested in the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Office Building. The arrest took place in the wee hours of the morning and the men had equipment with them which made it clear that they were either installing, repairing or removing electronic eavesdropping equipment. They also had fifty-three \$100 bills with them. One of the arrested men was the security chief of both the Committee for the Re-election of the President and the Republican National Committee. Two of the arrested men had documents in their possession linking them to a White House consultant—who in turn had been recommended for his White House duties by a Special Counsel to the President.

The Democrats filed a one million dollar suit against the Committee for the Re-election of the President, and the FBI began looking into the whole affair as did a federal grand jury. The White House consultant dropped out of sight for weeks. John Mitchell, then chairman of the campaign committee at first called the Democrats' suit a political stunt, but at a later date, lawyers for the Nixon campaign committee filed a request in court that the suit be postponed until after the election because it would cause "incalculable" damage to the President's campaign, deter contributions and dishearten campaign workers.

John Mitchell disclaimed knowledge of the whole affair and later resigned for family reasons. The lawyer for the five suspects fought fiercely to avoid being questioned by the grand jury. The chief counsel to the Nixon committee refused to answer the FBI's questions and was fired. The treasurer of the campaign committee also left his post telling people it was because his wife was pregnant.

The Justice Department, Mr. Mitchell's former place of employment, is pursuing the criminal and at the same time is defending in the Demo-

crats' civil suit Mr. Charles Colson, the White House Special Counsel. The Democrats have asked for the appointment of a special prosecutor with no political ties to take over the criminal investigation, and, under the circumstances it appears to be a reasonable request—even, we would think, to the Republicans if they have nothing to hide. Finally, it turns out that a \$25,000 check which was given to Maurice Stans, former Secretary of Commerce and the Finance Director of the campaign, as a campaign contribution, had ended up in the bank account of one of the arrested men along with \$89,000 from Mexican sources. It was this same bank account from which the 53 \$100 bills were drawn.

And, so there we are . . . just about nowhere . . . because Mr. Stans has such a busy travel schedule that he can't find time to talk about this whole affair, Mr. Mitchell is unavailable for comment, White House press secretaries have "no comment" and the President has retreated off to the middle of a majestic silence.

Older people have become fond, in recent years, of telling idealistic younger ones to "work within the system" and the President has told us in other contexts that he won't demean the presidency. Yet what are younger people and the rest of us, for that matter, to think when political skulduggery is uncovered in circumstances that make it appear, any way, that the committee headed by one of the President's closest friends and advisers may well have financed the whole caper? And what are we to think when two former members of the President's cabinet, who are in a position to enlighten the public and clear the matter up, clam up like a ball player who just made three errors and had an 0-for-10 doubleheader? Are the Republicans so rich that they can misplace \$25,000 checks and are we to believe that underlings are given latitude to handle such amounts? And where is the President in all of this. After all, the committee has been formed for the purpose of re-electing *him*, and it is *his* presidency that he doesn't want to demean.

Presumably, at some future date, the FBI will complete its investigation, the grand jury will finish its work and some people will be tried. The Democrats' suit will come to trial and the GAO investigation of the contributions will be completed. Meanwhile, a squalid cloud hangs over the evidence of the White House and the Nixon campaign committee. The men who can clear it up—and who presumably have most to gain from doing so—are silent. Their silence further discredits the political process and does a disservice, by extension, to us all.