

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 1972

PAGE A14

## A Glimpse of Mr. Stans

Well, at least one of the mysteries about the Watergate, GOP campaign financing caper has been cleared up. Maurice Stans hasn't lost his voice. He's just been unwilling to talk to the public. But the other day, he talked long enough on the phone to the GAO to persuade that agency's elections office at the last minute to postpone the publicly announced release of an audit report on the financing of the Committee for the Re-election of the President. And his voice held up long enough to persuade Philip S. Hughes, director of the elections office, to hop immediately on a plane and fly on down to Miami Beach to confer with Mr. Stans, who was attending the Republican National Convention there. And then, Mr. Stans found his voice again, when he was located by Mike Wallace, a determined CBS reporter, in what Wallace described as the "unlit reaches" at the back of the convention hall.

The result of Mr. Stans' two uncharacteristic breaches of his recent silence is to create further uneasiness over the whole quietude that the Nixon campaign committee has clamped over the Watergate and campaign financing business. The report which the GAO abruptly declined to release has been described by sources inside the agency as the "final final draft" on which investigators and others had been working for three weeks. Presumably, there had been a substantial interchange of both dialogue and documents between the investigators and the Nixon campaign committee for the agency to come to its "final final" position. Yet, only after this newspaper and others reported that the GAO had turned up possibly as much as \$500,000 in questionable campaign accounting, did Mr. Stans, by his own account, summon the investigators to Miami—not to his Washington headquarters, where presumably the records are kept—to review "hundreds of documents" concerning the campaign committee's reports. Given the lengthy silence and the last minute change of mind by the GAO, that is a hard story to swallow without further explanation.

Then, in his interview with Mr. Wallace, Mr. Stans refused to discuss substantive matters involving the Watergate caper on the ground that the grand jury investigating the case had not yet completed its work, and thus, discussion of the case now might violate the civil rights of the individuals involved in the investigation.

This solicitude for civil rights might go down very well were it not for two other factors. The first is that Clark MacGregor has already confirmed that the \$25,000 campaign contribution check went

from Mr. Dahlberg to Mr. Stans to Mr. Sloan, former campaign treasurer, to Mr. G. Gordon Liddy, former finance counsel to the campaign. And Mr. MacGregor has expressed his ignorance as to why "the departed" Mr. Liddy exchanged the check for cash. So, there has already been a little finger pointing even as the public is being kept in the dark.

The second factor is that the civil rights issue was raised very late in the history of this whole business after, as a matter of fact, sources inside the campaign committee assured the press that Mr. Stans would come forth shortly with a "logical explanation" of the matter. Then, more silence, and suddenly a great concern about the civil rights of prospective inditees and prospective innocents emerged.

Meanwhile, time passes and questions continue to pile up, as does public uneasiness. For instance, links between \$89,000 which passed through Mexico and wound up in the bank account of one of those arrested at the Watergate and the Nixon campaign committee's funds have become tighter. Then, Mr. Hughes, one of the most respected men in government, postponed his report and hastened to Miami. Meanwhile, the date for the grand jury's return seems to slide quietly into the future. At first, about a week ago, it seemed imminent, then it was to be a week or two and now, the Attorney General says it will be after the first of the month. That latter is an interesting date because, under the rules of the court where any persons indicted would be tried, an indictment handed down in August would almost assure a trial prior to the election while an indictment handed down after the first of September would almost assure that the trial could not be held prior to the election.

So, the questions hang and the longer they hang, the larger the cynicism about the political process and about the integrity of our institutions becomes. The latest credibility casualty, the GAO's elections unit is especially unfortunate. This is its first investigation. Mr. Hughes' impressive reputation has been an enormous asset to the operation. Now, the quick turnabout this week leaves one wondering about its susceptibility to political pressure. This need not be an irreparable injury. An early comprehensive report might help wash away the suspicion that this week's meeting in Miami was designed to keep things quiet. Similarly, a comprehensive report by Mr. Stans and by former campaign chief John Mitchell could do much to restore some faith in the integrity of the Republicans' campaign financing procedures and allow the campaign to proceed on the issues rather than on suspicion and innuendo.