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Mr. Connally and the Milk Case

THE INDICTMENT of John B. Connally at the federal courthouse yesterday has an obvious relation to the impeachment proceedings a few blocks away at the Capitol. There the Judiciary Committee is debating the proper grounds upon which to base its bill of impeachment. Mr. Connally, who was Secretary of the Treasury in 1971, is accused of having taken \$10,000 from the Associated Milk Producers Inc. for recommending the increase in the milk support price that year. There is no doubt that Mr. Connally vigorously urged the increase on President Nixon, for the Judiciary Committee has published the transcript of the meeting at which the President and his advisers (including Mr. Connally) made the decision.

Whether Mr. Connally is guilty or innocent is a question for the criminal courts to settle. As far as his political career is concerned, his previously known involvement in the milk case had probably ended it even before this latest disaster of the indictment. The larger public question now lies in the great contrast between the vigorous criminal prosecution of the President's subordinates in the milk case, and the Judiciary Committee's hesitation to proceed against the President himself in the same case. We have repeatedly argued that this case, with the trade of higher milk price supports for a promise of \$2 million in campaign contributions, is a clear example of bribery that involves Mr. Nixon personally. But the Judiciary Committee has made it rather clear that it does not want to get into issues of campaign contributions. It is trying to draft a bill of impeachment that can attract the widest possible support in Congress. That choice is defensible on practical grounds, for impeachment is not a step to be taken by a narrow or partisan majority.

But the country is left to reflect that when the impeachment case is over, the questions of political fund-raising and bribery will still lie unresolved before us. It is useful to keep in mind the breadth of the campaign fund scandals that the 1972 election generated. Eleven major business corporations have pleaded guilty to illegal contributions, and a twelfth has been indicted. Herbert W. Kalmbach, Mr. Nixon's former lawyer and fund raiser, was a major figure in the milk case. He is now in federal prison on unrelated charges including selling the promise of an ambassadorship for a \$100,000 contribution. David L. Parr, formerly special counsel to AMPI, pleaded guilty last week to a conspiracy involving illegal corporate contributions to many campaigns, including Sen. Hubert Humphrey's presidential campaign in 1968.

Regardless of the outcome of the impeachment proceedings, as we have observed before, Mr. Nixon is not going to be running in 1976. But AMPI will still be very much in business. It will be chastened and careful, no doubt. But there are a hundred other lobbies equally active and equally well-heeled. The threat of criminal prosecution does not seem to have proved a very effective deterrent to violation of the existing laws. Illegal political fund-raising, surrounded by strong suggestions of bribery and extortion, appears to be an increasingly common menace to the integrity of our elections. If Congress does not choose to respond to this danger in the impeachment process now under way, its duty becomes more urgent than ever to condemn past malpractices and promote higher standards for public officeholders by enacting an effective, enforceable campaign financing law.