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The Republicans: "Oh, God, What a Mess"

Well, let's see, now, what does the list of casualties look like today? First of all, there was Will Wilson, former head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, who resigned his post after the cloud of a Texas financial scandal followed him to the seat of a government that had come to power promising to restore law and order. Then, there was Richard McLaren who was hustled into a federal judgeship with unseemly haste, although with apparent honor, when as head of Justice's Anti-Trust Division, he had dropped his strong opposition to a settlement of the ITT anti-trust case and acceded to it. There was John Mitchell, who resigned the chairmanship of the Committee for the Re-election of the President after the Watergate caper at Democratic National Committee headquarters was uncovered and after his wife had likened politics to a "cops and robbers game"—for family reasons. There is G. Gordon Liddy, former financial counsel of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, who was fired for refusing to answer the questions of FBI agents looking into the Watergate caper and there was Hugh W. Sloan, Jr., former treasurer of the Nixon campaign committee, who quit just last month claiming that it was because his wife was pregnant.

Now, there is one more casualty and another man is hanging on the ropes. The first is Douglas W. English, former special assistant to the co-chairman of the Republican National Committee, the other is James T. Blair, banking director of the United States Postal Service. English was fired just this week and Blair is reported to be under investigation by his superiors. A bit more should be said about them before going on to the implications of this whole list. It seems that there was a local real estate developer who was looking for a half million dollar loan from the First National City Bank of New York. Mr. English thought that Mr. Blair, whose Postal Service does a \$5,000,000 a day business with the bank might just be helpful so he asked for that help. Mr. Blair accommodated and made a call to his contact at the bank. Lo and behold, the loan was made.

Thereafter, Mr. English received a \$5,000 check which has now been acknowledged to be a payment for his services in the matter. To make it more interesting, the check was made out by a man who was under indictment on charges of bribing former Sen. Daniel B. Brewster. When Mr. English's boss at the Republican National Committee learned of the \$5,000 payment, he promptly fired him. When Mr.

Blair found out about the payment, he said, "Oh, God, what a mess." Until that moment, he apparently thought nothing was wrong with a transaction in which he used a powerful public business connection to arrange a private interest transaction. He was just doing a favor for a friend, he said, so at present he is on leave without pay and under investigation.

Now, we can't say that all the casualties noted above left office bloodied by misdeeds. Family problems clearly played at least a part in Mr. Mitchell's decision to resign and Judge McLaren, though he departed quickly, apparently pursued his duties here with integrity and tenacity.

Nor, indeed, do we equate the direct public business, in the Postal Service and the Justice Department with the campaign business of the Republican Party. Nonetheless, Mr. English was working in the electoral process and was close to official power. Similarly the people who left the President's re-election committee had been dealing with money donated by a segment of the public for a specific purpose—to promote a part of the most important public process in our land, the election of a President of the United States. Those monies are deemed so much a part of an important public process in fact that there are federal laws regulating their receipt and use and an arm of a federal agency has been created to monitor all of that.

So, again we find ourselves mired chin deep in the dismal swamp of politics played by a party and an administration which came to power on a promise to restore "law and order". All of the departed left behind situations where the line between the public business and private designs seem, at the very best, to have been blurred. The administration's conduct of the public business, the Republican party's pursuit of its aims by means it deems necessary and the advancement of private interests with public muscle all seem to have murky connections which cannot help making a watching public uneasy and distrustful.

Explanations which are rarely forthright—as the one now seeping out from Maurice Stans about how a \$25,000 check slipped through his fingers (a matter to which we shall return)—have not been reassuring, to put it mildly. From this vantage point, the President's notion and that of his administration and his party of what law and order should be concerning the lines that divide public business and private interests seems defective and slipshod to say the least. It has been—and continues to be—a very unsavory performance.