

Von Hoffman

No Comment

Washington

THE MAN ON THE television screen looked like a Brooklyn gangster coming in to be questioned by the D.A. The same sunglasses, the same concealing snap-brimmed straw hat with the plaid hat band and the same hand cupped over the face so the cameramen couldn't get a recognizable shot.



Nicholas von Hoffman

on the Republican payroll.

In the grand tradition, Hunt Jr. wasn't talking. The White House had decided to tough it out with silence. Only Richard (the ITT Kid) Kleindienst is singing and his song is that he's going to investigate the matter and let us know bye and bye.

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THIS IS IN LINE with the Republican policy they took in 1958 when it was discovered that President Eisenhower's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, had used his influence with federal regulatory agencies on behalf of a Boston manufacturer from whom he'd accepted \$3000 in hotel accommodations, an Oriental rug and a vicuna coat.

Adams had to go before a Congressional committee to testify about what he had done. In the preceding administration, when Harry Truman's military aide, Major General Harry Vaughan, was caught accepting seven food freezers from a cheapie Washington deal fixer, Vaughan also had to go up on the Hill and talk.

Of course, back in those days there wasn't so much to talk about. There were scandals enough then, but what's gone on under Nixon is not to be believed. Forget the minor stuff, forget the old stuff, like the Howard Hughes loan to Nixon's brother, or Harry Dent, special counsel to the President, sending out letters on White House stationery to help his brother sell houses in his real estate business.

Look at what we've had recently: the dairy industry getting shaken down for campaign contributions in return for which milk price supports are raised; a Minnesota businessman kicking in 25 grand to the campaign fund and being expeditiously issued an enormously valuable federal bank charter; an assistant secretary of agriculture negotiating credits so that the Russians can buy farm commodities, and then quitting his job to take another one with a grain company which then cashes in on the credit arrangements to make the sale: hundreds of thousands of dollars slipped into blind Mexican bank accounts and then filtered back.

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THIS DOUGH DIDN'T come from the widows of American servicemen trying to bribe their way into Arlington National Cemetery to bury their fallen husbands. It came from large corporations.

Should you have forgotten why it pays a big corporation to slip this money under the table, Ohio Congressman Charles Vanik has been researching the effective tax rates some of them pay. Last year for ITT it was 4.9 per cent; 3.2 per cent for Texaco; 1.2 per cent for Norfolk and Western Railway; 3.3 per cent for Consolidated Edison, and 18.6 per cent for Union Carbide, a figure still far below what millions of families must fork over.

Vanik's researchers show the smaller the corporation the larger the tax it pays. Thus while small companies were averaging about 37 per cent in effective taxes, the top 100 were paying about 24 per cent, a drop of 2.5 per cent since Nixon took office. It is this competitive advantage, Vanik concludes, that allows outfits like ITT to have the cash to finance their conglomerate expansion.

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ALL OF THESE scandals, special deals and peculiar privileges can be explained by such nice pussy terms as conflict of interest, bad judgment, influence, pressure groups pushing in a pluralist society, and so it all may be in this era of the New Politics.

Well the old politics had a word for it too, and the word is graft. There was honest graft and dishonest graft, legal graft and illegal graft, but it all meant paying for what you weren't entitled to, and Mr. Nixon had better start explaining it soon.