

Expendable Mystery

Things keep getting murkier in the case of the five men arrested June 17 on charges of breaking into Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington with electronic bugging devices, photographic copying equipment and a substantial amount of money. It now appears that the money came from the bank account of one of the arrested suspects—an account in which he had previously deposited a \$25,000 check ostensibly intended for the Republican election campaign. Kenneth H. Dahlberg, a Republican party regional finance chairman, reports that he delivered the check to Maurice H. Stans, the party's chief fund-raiser, to cover cash contributions collected for President Nixon's re-election.

Whatever the explanation for this bizarre chain of events, Senator Proxmire of Wisconsin was justified in asking for an audit by the Office of Federal Elections, a watchdog agency of the General Accounting Office created under the recently enacted Federal campaign expenditures law. Philip S. Hughes, director of the new agency, promptly agreed to undertake the audit on the reasonable ground that the bugging incident was now, for the first time, related to the campaign finance law. It will be up to him to discover whether the \$25,000 contribution was duly recorded and whether it was disbursed for valid purposes.

Illuminating as that investigation should prove, it will not dispel all the mysteries that surround the invasion of the Democratic headquarters. To insure full disclosure, President Nixon would do well to take the advice of Joseph F. Califano, counsel to the Democratic National Committee, and appoint a special prosecutor in the bugging case. As Mr. Califano points out, the Justice Department inevitably has an interest in protecting a Committee for the Re-election of the President. More particularly, the department is already defending a Presidential aide in a civil suit brought by the Democrats as a result of the same incident—an obvious conflict of interest.

Both parties will benefit if this ugly little mystery is cleared up and disposed of as quickly as possible—and as objectively as a puzzled public has a right to demand.