

Dirty Tricks and the Faith of a Free People

Although many details remain to be filled in, the information revealed this weekend about the underside of the effort to re-elect Richard Nixon tells us almost as much as we need to know about the contours and the philosophy of that effort — as well as the authority for it. The new characters added to the cast—Dwight Chapin, the President's appointment secretary; Herbert Kalmbach, the President's private lawyer and Donald Segretti, a college classmate of Chapin's and a roving saboteur in the President's re-election campaign—reinforce the impression that the Watergate crimes were almost a peripheral part of a powerful, wide and centrally directed effort in what may be the dirtiest presidential campaign in memory.

Messrs. Clark MacGregor and Ronald Ziegler, in statements which deserve to be dealt with at length and to which we shall turn our full attention tomorrow, have characterized the coverage of this whole affair, and particularly The Post's coverage, as being malicious and corrupt in itself. At this point it will suffice to say that we regard those charges as spurious, diversionary and off the real point. The administration and the Nixon campaign committee could better be addressing those issues about which they know more than they are telling: What is the full story of what has been done in the name of Richard Nixon's reelection, by whom and under whose authority? Mr. MacGregor did not answer these questions—he refused to answer any questions at all. For our part, we will continue to furnish our readers as much of the story as honest journalistic enterprise can provide.

This latest business is not very complicated. Mr. Segretti was apparently recruited to play dirty tricks on the campaigns of Democratic presidential hopefuls and to wreak havoc on them. He was also a recruiter of other dirty tricksters. He and his activities came to light in the investigation of the crimes against the Democratic Committee headquarters at a time when the President and all about him were disavowing knowledge of that particular incident and urging the public to have faith in the FBI's "most thorough and complete investigation since the murder of President Kennedy."

Faith had already begun to unravel when Time magazine disclosed that Mr. Segretti was recruited by Mr. Chapin, the doorkeeper to the President's office and by another White House aide, Mr. Gordon Strachan, an aide to H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff. Mr. Chapin, according to a sworn affidavit, was one of the people in Washington to whom Mr. Segretti reported. Faith began to unravel a bit more when law enforcement sources disclosed that Mr. Segretti's activities had been financed out of a cash slush fund kept in the safe of Maurice Stans, the President's chief fund raiser. That fund was jointly controlled, according to law enforcement sources, by former Attorney General John L. Mitchell, the President's private lawyer, Mr. Kalmbach, an unnamed White House official, and others. Then the law enforcement sources let it be known that the funds paid Mr. Segretti were either authorized or actually paid by none other than the President's personal lawyer.

Finally, faith collapsed with the conjoining stories by a friend of Mr. Segretti's and knowledge-

able people who have apparently had access to his statements to law enforcement bodies to the effect that Mr. Segretti was actually shown copies of FBI reports about him by White House aides and was coached by these same aides on what his testimony to the grand jury should be. Segretti was assured by the White House aides that he would be asked "easy questions" before the grand jury. Apparently he was until an indomitable woman juror decided that she wanted to find out what the whole thing was about.

So, the outlines of this part of the campaign are pretty clear. Here are some of the allegations. There was a \$10 million secret Nixon campaign fund. There was at least \$100,000 laundered through Mexico. There was \$700,000 in cash crammed into a suitcase and delivered to Nixon campaign headquarters. There was Alfred Baldwin lugging an unregistered gun and listening to illegal wiretaps under the impression that all of that was all right because he was working for the former Attorney General of the United States. There was the stash in Mr. Stans' safe. There was the phony "canuck letter" allegedly produced in the White House by Ken W. Clawson. There was illegally obtained information being transmitted to another White House aide. And now, there are Mr. Chapin, Mr. Kalmbach and Mr. Segretti.

Yesterday there was Mr. John Erlichman, the President's domestic affairs adviser, on television suggesting alternatively that he knows nothing about all this and that "political pranks" have been a part of the American electoral folklore for many years. If indeed, pranks were all that were intended, Mr. Erlichman, his colleagues and his superior would be well advised to open the files of the whole investigation to the public so that we can make a judgment as to what was intended, what was authorized, how much the White House was involved in these "pranks" and what may have gone beyond the bounds of what was intended.

As it stands now, the allegations, if true, add up to the most arrogant assault ever mounted on the political process, the institutions of government and the credulity of the people. Unchallenged in any substantive way, day by day, they draw an ever closer circle around the oval office — right up to its doorkeeper. White House aides tampering with the judicial process, former White House aides running around with guns in briefcases, former cabinet officers keeping and controlling a slush fund used to finance political sabotage, and the President's lawyer paying off a saboteur go far beyond any games we can get involved in. It doesn't much matter any more than the President hasn't personally been connected directly to all of this. The people who have been are not exactly strangers to him. They know his mind. They know his character. And he, presumably, knows theirs. They are his men and they do what he wants them to do. From the generally denied, but unrebutted allegations, it seems that what they determined was in his best interests was that he obtain re-election by any means necessary and at whatever cost. At this point, it looks like the cost is apt to be lost faith of a free people. There could hardly be a higher cost.