

The Smoke Rises

By WILLIAM V. SHANNON

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12—The Nixon people watching their thirty-point lead in the opinion polls, their swelling campaign coffers, and the dissension among the Democrats have only one nervous fear as they count the days until Nov. 7. They dread that one or another of the scandals smouldering around them may break into open flame before the election.

Each day brings some fresh danger. The latest is the amended complaint in the Watergate case naming Maurice H. Stans, former Secretary of Commerce and finance chairman of the Nixon campaign, three lesser aides, and the Nixon campaign organization itself—the Committee to Re-elect the President—as additional codefendants. Previously only the five men arrested last June while breaking into the Democratic National Committee offices had been listed as defendants.

The Administration has been hoping desperately to hush up the Watergate scandal—easily the most ambitious and most sinister espionage operation ever mounted against the political opposition in this country—by indicting the five agents who were caught, then proclaiming the case “solved.”

What the Administration most definitely does not want is the publication of any evidence that might link the captured agents with Mr. Stans or John Mitchell, the former Attorney General who was the Nixon campaign manager at the time of the Watergate affair. Yet it is an open secret that the five arrested men had to be operating on behalf of someone more powerful than themselves to whom they turned over the wiretapped material and from whom they received \$114,000 in Nixon campaign funds.

The Nixon people are trying to take cover behind the F.B.I. investigation. But the F.B.I. is now headed by a political lawyer who is a Nixon protégé. The F.B.I. investigation has been kept to a very narrow channel. For example, it appears that Federal agents did not obtain a search warrant and make an exhaustive search through the offices of the Committee to Re-elect the President to find any scrap of information which might open up all the ramifications of this operation.

Lacking the police powers of the Government, the lawyers representing the Democratic party in the Watergate suit probably cannot get the whole story. But the fact that Edward Bennett Williams, the city's foremost criminal lawyer who is representing the Democrats without a fee, has amended the complaint to include Mr. Stans' name is enough to send tremors through the Nixon organization.

A second private lawsuit has brought the milk scandal back into the

news. On March 12, 1971, the Agriculture Department denied dairymen's request for a higher Government-ordered price support for milk. Two weeks later it reversed itself and approved the increase, a shift which cost consumers upwards of \$500 million in higher milk prices.

Last month a lawsuit of the National Farmers Organization against the major national dairy cooperatives brought to light letters which detailed how the dairy lobby kicked in large sums of money to the Republican party just before and just after the Agriculture Department reversed itself.

Common Cause, headed by John Gardner, last week filed yet a third private lawsuit on still another front. This suit seeks to require the Nixon campaign organization to obey the Federal Corrupt Practices Act and give an accounting of the more than \$10-million in campaign money collected in the weeks leading up to April 7 when the new Federal law went into effect requiring disclosure of political contributions. Lawyers for the Nixon campaign insist that loopholes in the Corrupt Practices Act permit them to hide the names of these early contributors. Common Cause, however, is asking for an injunction that would compel the disclosure of all Nixon contributions made between Jan. 1, 1971 and April 7, 1972.

While all these fires are smouldering, smoke begins to rise from the grain bin. It now appears that ordinary wheat farmers sold their early crop at low prices while the big grain dealers made a killing, perhaps because they had advance information that the Russian purchases of wheat this summer would be much heavier than expected. The suspicion that the grain dealers may have had such prior knowledge is strengthened by the fact that under the Nixon Administration, top officers of those firms and top officials of the Agriculture Department regularly exchange positions like partners in a square dance.

The Watergate case, the milk case, the hidden contributions, the grain case—everywhere the smoke is rising. In times like these, an Attorney General of acknowledged distinction could be a great help to a troubled Administration. But the mention of Attorney General Richard Kleindienst only recalls the long struggle over his confirmation because of his involvement in the irregular settlement of the I.T.T. antitrust case. What might happen if Mrs. Dita Beard, the once talkative I.T.T. lobbyist whose confidential memo put the I.T.T. settlement on the front pages, were to recover from her mysterious heart ailment and tell all that she knows? There are some worries that even a big lead in the Gallup Poll cannot relieve.