

Independent Scrutiny

The findings by the General Accounting Office that the Committee to Re-elect the President has committed "apparent and possible violations" of the Federal Election Campaign Act calls for an immediate, full-scale inquiry by investigators of unassailable credibility.

The issues are far more serious than even the substantial amounts of campaign contributions and expenditures which apparently changed hands without the required public disclosure. Some of these hidden resources seem to have found their way into the pockets of those shadowy figures who were arrested in June while breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate apartments. This suggests something more sinister than illegal efforts to protect the anonymity of bashful campaign contributors.

The list of unanswered questions grows larger every day. Elusive funds have been transferred from committee safes to banks in Miami and Mexico City. Some participants in these dubious events—including at least one former member of the White House political staff—have refused to answer questions or disappeared altogether. Former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans, who now is the chief Republican money raiser, has not to date given full and satisfactory explanations concerning the source and disposition of some of these mysterious funds. Mr. Stans moreover had also directed the crash campaign to get a maximum of anonymous cash into the campaign coffers before the new public disclosure laws went into effect last April.

The risk incurred when those who seek favorable governmental rulings are also anonymous campaign contributors was once again underscored. A charter to open a suburban bank appears to have been expedited shortly after the applicant contributed \$25,000 to the Republican campaign. And according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, all or part of that contribution, which the donor had hoped would remain anonymous, seems to have found its way into the bank account of one of the planners of the Watergate political espionage.

The White House remains silent. The Justice Department promises only that the G.A.O. findings will be handled "routinely." Does this mean that the stable doors are to be locked after the elections have gone?

Responsibility to investigate cannot be left in the hands of the Administration's own officialdom. The G.A.O., as the Congressional watchdog, lacks subpoena power. The Committee to Re-elect the President—not surprisingly—"welcomes the opportunity" to deal with the Justice Department in these matters. Indeed, a spokesman for the committee expressed confidence that the Justice Department will find the alleged violations to be "nothing more than minor and technical." This is precisely why this investigation cannot be left to a department with strong political ties to the Administration and to the Nixon re-election committee.

What is involved in these tawdry proceedings is not an obscure political caper but the integrity of the election process and of government itself. The issues range from allegations of serious financial abuses to nothing less than political espionage. The charges implicate persons close to the White House.

This is why the President himself should act at once to appoint a special prosecutor of unquestioned political independence and judicial integrity. The American people have a right to demand all the facts and the fair and impartial prosecution of any violators of the laws.