

Bugging Is No Joke

White House spokesman Ronald Ziegler's flip dismissal of the attempted bugging of Democratic party national headquarters is in keeping with the Nixon Administration's casual attitude toward the issue of electronic surveillance. The abortive espionage, Mr. Ziegler would have us understand, is nothing more than a "third-rate burglary" unworthy of comment.

The press secretary's assessment stands in ironic juxtaposition to the recent unanimous Supreme Court decision declaring domestic wiretapping by the Government without prior court approval unconstitutional. Because the very viability of an open society rests on the legal protection of freely exchanged ideas, any indiscriminate attempt to intrude on the privacy of law-abiding citizens by electronic means has sinister implications and requires investigation.

This is particularly true in light of the prior affiliations of those arrested. All five men have had C.I.A. connections and one is employed by President Nixon's re-election committee as a security coordinator. Another individual, E. Howard Hunt, whose name is listed in the address books of two of those apprehended, has been a consultant to a White House special counsel.

The President's campaign manager, former Attorney General John Mitchell, denies foreknowledge of the raid, and any evidence linking the Republican party to the incident is at this point circumstantial. The Democratic National Committee's suit against the Committee to Re-elect the President rings of election-year partisanship and hyperbole. The question remains, however, by whom and for what purpose the bugging was ordered. Mr. Hunt's refusal to make himself available for questioning, and the Republican National Committee's internal memo ordering those on the payroll to be silent, serve only to fuel speculation about the direction and motives of the act.

A thorough Federal investigation is in the best interest of both political parties and the nation as a whole.