

Time to Come Clean

President Nixon's campaign machinery is increasingly compromised as more and more details emerge concerning the outrageous burglarizing of the Democratic National Committee headquarters last June. The accused leader of the band that broke into the party's offices in Washington's Watergate Building has admitted his role in the crime while refusing to offer explanations. Two of the arrested men had connections with the President's election committee, and a recent White House assistant has been dismissed for refusing to answer questions put to him by the F.B.I.

The Republican campaign leadership deserves its deepening embarrassment for having failed to this moment to take the single action that might restore the country's confidence in the Committee to Re-elect the President. That one action, obviously, is to remove the probing of this unsavory incident from partisan hands.

It must be clear to President Nixon and to Clark MacGregor, his campaign manager, that the public cannot be expected simply to expel the matter from its mind until the defendants come to trial—long after the election. The accused are entitled to their day in court; but however they may account for their illicit presence in the Democratic headquarters—loaded with “bugging” equipment, cameras and cash contributed to the Republican campaign—their personal guilt or innocence is not among the prime questions which voters are entitled to have answered.

Those questions include the following: How did campaign cash allegedly delivered to former Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans, the party's chief fundraiser, get into the bank accounts of the arrested men? Are Democratic leaders right in asserting that \$114,000 in anonymous contributions were not truthfully accounted for in the Republican committee's books? Why did Mr. Stans refuse to tell what he knows of the matter to a Congressional committee that offered him a forum?

It is too much to expect that full and frank answers to these and other pertinent questions will be elicited by Justice Department officials beholden to the Administration they serve. The General Accounting office, designated by Congress to protect the public against violations of the new campaign finance law, was not endowed with subpoena powers.

It is surely unreasonable to ask voters to make a choice on Election Day without taking this sinister affair into account. That leaves the President with one responsible course of action—to appoint either a wholly impartial investigator or a bipartisan commission to explore the Watergate incident, at least in its financial aspects, and to order all his subordinates—from Mr. Stans on down—to answer questions freely or resign. Self-serving rhetoric will no longer satisfy.