

Now, More Than Ever

The burglary at Democratic national headquarters last June was nothing compared with what we now are told was being done to prevent the people from making a free choice about who is to govern us during the next four years. In essence, a story in this newspaper Tuesday revealed that the FBI discovered that some of Mr. Nixon's White House employees and some of his agents in the committee to re-elect Richard Nixon were skulking around in disguise in a concerted effort to subvert the election process in the Democratic primaries by means that include spying on Democratic candidates, their families and their staffs; functioning as double-agents and provocateurs; and manufacturing false "information" to put before the American electorate.

The FBI apparently characterized these activities as a massive campaign of political espionage and sabotage. It could as accurately be called a massive assault on the democratic process in this country. The latest revelations—that Ken W. Clawson of the White House staff was the author of a letter bearing a fictitious signature and falsely accusing Sen. Muskie of a slur on an ethnic group and that Donald Segretti was going around recruiting undercover agents to wreak havoc in Democratic campaigns—merely underscores the fact that the Republicans' Department of Dirty Tricks was a broad, varied and ugly operation. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that several separate lines of this operation have been traced into the White House itself. There is E. Howard Hunt, indicted for the Watergate crimes, who was a White House consultant, recommended for his job by the President's counsel, Charles Colson. There is William Timmons, a White House congressional aide, who is an alleged recipient of the fruit of the illegal Watergate wiretaps. And, there is Mr. Clawson, deputy director of White House communications, fabricating a slur on a group of voters in order to throw the Democratic primary in New Hampshire into a muddle.

We have previously called in these columns for a complete congressional investigation of this whole matter, excluding the Watergate crimes, which are now clearly incidental to the whole matter. Joseph

L. Rauh Jr. has argued thoughtfully that exposure for exposure's sake is both dangerous and probably unconstitutional. We do not believe, however, at this point that it is simply a question of exposure for exposure's sake. If there is no law or no set of laws making illegal the damage the administration and the Nixon campaign committee have done this year to our right to govern ourselves, there ought to be a law. The use of White House, government and campaign resources to confuse, confound and corrupt the electoral process in this country is about as deeply inimicable to the rights and the interests of a free people as anything we can think of. And, it is about as appropriate a matter of legislative interest to the Congress as any we can think of.

Rep. Wright Patman, chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, has a clear legislative purpose in mind as he attempts to trace suitcase money out of Mexico and to find out about a quickie bank charter granted to Republican donors and fund raisers. While we wish him well in his effort to have key Republican figures appear before him voluntarily, that course seems fruitless, in the end. It will, of course, tell us something if the four invitees decline Mr. Patman's invitation, but, if they and they alone come to testify, little will have been gained for there are many others who are involved in and knowledgeable about the Republican Party's Department of Dirty Tricks. Nothing less than a full airing will permit the Congress and the people to assess the damage that has been done to them and to begin to construct defenses against such activities in the future.

On the Senate side, the full Judiciary Committee and its subcommittees on administrative practices and constitutional rights would also seem to have clear legislative mandates to go into this affair. Now, more than ever, as they say, the voters have a right and a need to know all they can about this business prior to the election—either in the course of a speedy trial or by a congressional investigation. This week's disclosures should have resolved any doubt about that.