

The Whole Story

The imminent appointment by Attorney General-designate Richardson of a special prosecutor in the Watergate case is only half of what needs doing. The much more important half is that the person chosen be of professional stature and demonstrable independence—totally free of any ties to President Nixon or Mr. Richardson.

Ideally, the choice of a special prosecutor should be delegated by the incoming Attorney General to a panel made up of the deans of leading law schools or the presidents of major bar associations. Such a procedure need not be time-consuming, and it is essential to insulate the individual chosen from all sense of obligation to the President or the Attorney General. Since so many eminent persons are potentially available, it is necessary only to outline the relevant experience rather than propose specific names. A present or former prosecutor or judge with demonstrated skill in the practice of criminal law and the requisite detachment from Administration ties would have the best credential for this difficult post.

The sensitivity of the issues can hardly be exaggerated. Their ramifications involve not only President Nixon's closest political advisers and White House aides, but also his brother, his nephew and his personal attorney. The General Accounting Office has had to prod the Justice Department repeatedly to get even feeble enforcement of the Federal law on reporting of campaign contributions.

Not until this week did the Justice Department finally take action against the Committee to Re-elect the President for concealing a contribution of \$200,000 in cash from Robert L. Vesco, a financier who has left the country rather than answer questions about his mutual fund manipulations. The department stated that the Nixon committee acted through Maurice Stans, its finance chairman, and Hugh P. Sloan Jr., its treasurer, yet no action was taken against them. Why?

It may well be that the department's decision is defensible but the public cannot accept that decision on faith alone. The President's nephew is an assistant to Mr. Vesco. One of the President's brothers was an intermediary in arranging the contribution. Mr. Stans served in the President's Cabinet as Secretary of Commerce and has for many years been one of his closest associates.

Because personal entanglements and dawdling prosecution have been so omnipresent in this monstrous scandal, it would have been appropriate for Mr. Nixon to have initiated the search for an independent prosecutor, even before he set about choosing a new Attorney General.

At this stage a prosecutor genuinely independent is much more essential than a new Attorney General—one drawn from inside the Administration—in re-establishing public confidence in the integrity of governmental process. Since President Nixon inexplicably failed to respond to this necessity, it is now up to the Senate to insist upon the appointment of an outsider to direct the prosecution of these multiplying scandals.