

# Indicted

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Although it may be difficult to bear in mind when so many sensational developments swirl into view each day, the essential fact remains that individuals—including those at the highest levels of government—are properly convicted only in a court of law and *not* in the press or on television.

Moreover, indictment does *not* mean guilt; and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans, who were indicted yesterday, are still innocent in the eyes of the law. An indictment is a formal accusation which starts a trial in motion; until that trial is completed and the jury reaches a decision, American law presumes the innocence of every defendant.

Conspiracy, the crime for which these former Cabinet members have been indicted, is easy to infer but difficult to prove. The prosecution has to show that when Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Stans secretly accepted a campaign contribution of \$200,000 in cash from Robert L. Vesco, they actually intended to obstruct the workings of justice in his behalf. Until the accused have had a chance to tell their version of the facts in public and opposing witnesses have been cross-examined, it is only elemental fairness that the public withhold judgment on their guilt or innocence.

But it is not too early to reach an adverse judgment on the traditional practices of raising money for political campaigns in this country. No one should give or receive contributions in cash or in secret. Probably no one, even if his motives are totally disinterested, should be permitted to contribute sums as large as \$200,000.

The Democrats of the Senate have already voted unanimously in their caucus in favor of barring contributions of more than \$500 to candidates for any Federal office and in favor of public financing of most campaign costs. These specific proposals are arguable, but there should certainly be tougher penalties and more stringent enforcement than last year's law provided. (The old law it superseded was not enforced at all.) By enacting a comprehensive campaign finance law, Congress could seal off in the future the torrent of money which helped make possible the Watergate scandals.