

John P. Roche

Working Without the Suitcase

As has been noted here before, one of the most astonishing things about the Committee for the Re-election of the President (CREEP) was its blatant, garish modus operandi. The embassy to Luxembourg has been sold before, but never in quite such a boorish fashion — the last \$100,000 installment had to be in, well after the election, before formal action was initiated in the Senate. (Inflation has really taken its toll: Mrs. Ruth Farkas, our new ambassador to Luxembourg, contributed at least five times as much to Nixon's campaign as Perle Mesta did for Harry Truman in 1948).

Similarly, this business of couriers romping around with suitcases full of money is reminiscent of the era of President Grant and the Tweed Ring. True, unmarked bills leave no spoor for investigators to track, but really sophisticated operators don't carry checkbooks. There are other ways.

Indeed, eliminating corruption from politics is far more complicated than might at first sight seem to be the case. In a way the CREEP bunglers have made it look easy. Right now two former members of President Nixon's Cabinet are under indictment in New York for accepting a secret \$200,000 cash contribution from one Robert L. Vesco. Since Messrs. Mitchell and Stans have the same right to a fair

trial as any other Americans, I will make no comment on the merits. But I would like to suggest how the same alleged maneuver could have been transacted without the inevitable suitcase.

Let us suppose that Mr. X makes it known to the campaign manager that he wants to help in a big way, even though the action may make a dent in the criminal code. The campaign manager says he sees no problem: Mr. X, who runs a huge industrial, financial empire, must need the services of some consultants. Their services come high: 10 of them at \$20,000 for three months. In due course they are listed on X's payroll — which is immense — under the ambiguous job description "consultant." Needless to say, they are all working in the back rooms of Washington, writing speeches and performing other tasks.

Bird-dogging this kind of transaction is extremely difficult — one almost has to play for the lucky break, the guy who gets a few sheets in the wind and announces that he is not really a campaign worker, but a "consultant" to Unlimited Industries (a firm that to my knowledge does not exist). Otherwise you have to start going over the payrolls of major industries — a monumental auditing job.

On a personal note I might add that my fundamentally suspicious nature

led me to refuse any salary for my work in the 1964 campaign. Without suggesting that any funny business went on — I was miles away from the financial work of the campaign — I just didn't want to take any chances that somehow, five years later, I would hit the papers as a one-time "consultant" to some firm caught in the grips of the Department of Justice.

There are all kinds of virtually invisible pay-offs. To move to a different area, what about the interest-free loan. If Mr. Y wants to make a substantial contribution (or non-contribution), he will give a campaign, say, a million dollar interest-free loan. Looked at differently, he is taking a million bucks that could be earning him perhaps \$80,000 a year and sending it off to work for nothing. That is, he has made an \$80,000 contribution, though as I read the election law it would not be reported as such.

Mr. Nixon has recommended a bipartisan commission to eliminate fraud and scandal from politics. Let us hope that some members will know where the secret drawers are located: for openers, they might investigate the "loan" of credit cards to campaign workers by friendly corporations. Another auditor's nightmare, but one I suspect worth the effort.