

The Watergate, the Republicans and the GAO

The nation has been wondering what was going on ever since the early morning hours of June 17, when five men, loaded down with electronic eavesdropping devices, were apprehended by police in the Watergate Hotel offices of the Democratic National Committee in Washington, D.C. The mystery deepened when subsequent investigations revealed that one of the men arrested at the Watergate was the security co-ordinator of the Committee to Re-Elect the President, and that a \$25,000 check contributed to the same committee had passed through the bank account of another arrestee.

While a federal grand jury is looking into the possibility that criminal statutes were violated during the Watergate caper, that fast-moving \$25,000 check led the General Accounting Office to conduct an inquiry of its own. The GAO, the auditing and investigative agency of Congress, undertook the study because it is charged with monitoring the observance, by both parties, of the provisions of the Federal Election Campaign Act, which requires that items be accounted for, if they were contributed after April 7 of this year.

On August 26, the GAO released its report. The agency conceded its investigation was incomplete; it lacked the power to subpoena records and witnesses. Nevertheless, it found several "apparent and possible violations" of the act by assorted Republican campaign committees. The "violations" involved a total of \$350,000, and included failure to keep track of the \$25,000 check that occasioned the inquiry. Despite protestations to the contrary, the GAO determined that the check had been contributed after April 7.

The embarrassment the report caused the Republicans was not a little ironic; GOP Congressmen had labored mightily to make the act the GAO is monitoring as innocuous as possible, but it caught up with their party anyway. Trying to put the best face on a bad situation, Maurice H. Stans, finance chairman of Mr. Nixon's re-election committee and former Secretary of Commerce, charged that the report contained "serious misrepresentations," and asked for "a full and comprehensive audit" of the Democrats' finances. The GAO, he said, would find it "very revealing." The Democrats, in the person of George McGovern, profess to welcome the scrutiny. No one has mentioned it, of course, but the big reason why the GAO began with the Republicans is that the police haven't caught any Democrats

bugging the Republican National Committee's office.

The GAO's report is now in the hands of the Department of Justice, where the potential for a conflict of interest is great. The Attorney General, Richard Kleindienst, owes his present position in large part to his partisan loyalty to the Republican party. He now must exercise over-all supervision of an inquiry that may reveal criminal misconduct by high-ranking members of his party. It would be unfair to pass judgment on anyone's guilt or innocence before that investigation is concluded, but one thing is sure; if no indictments are returned, many people—and they won't all be Democratic party officials—will be convinced that politics influenced the decision not to prosecute.

Mr. Nixon politicized the upper levels of the Justice Department by appointing Republican stalwarts, first John Mitchell and then Mr. Kleindienst, to the post of Attorney General. The Watergate caper makes it clear that the price of that politicization was the endangering of the Department's own credibility.

China's Veto

The August 25 meeting of the UN Security Council was not without its ironic aspects. Hardly a year ago, one of its permanent members, the People's Republic of China, after having been excluded from the world organization for 25 years, finally won its seat in large measure on the theory that the UN could never function effectively unless the principle of "universality of membership" prevailed. On August 25, that same China denied the validity of the principle by casting a lone veto, its first as a member of the Security Council, to bar Bangladesh from the world body.

This negative vote of the People's Republic had at least one virtue: it served to focus attention once again on certain criticisms being leveled with increasing frequency today on international organization in general and on the UN in particular. For it was very clear on August 25 that it was neither the merits nor the demerits of the case for Bangladesh that decided the issue for China in the Security Council but Peking's politics of the moment.

And so, power politics has kept another nation out

