



Rowland Evans and Robert Novak



# Agnew: Out Like a Lamb?

IN A PRIVATE motel dining room here on the night of Sept. 23 Vice President Spiro T. Agnew astonished his staunchest Republican allies in Congress with an earnest pledge that under no circumstances would he run for re-election next year if his presence on the ticket would damage President Nixon's own re-election.

To some 35 Republican congressmen who heard him, Agnew's pledge was totally credible. Coming at a time of rising talk about the possibility of Mr. Nixon naming Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally as his 1972 running-mate, the Vice President's words were a potent sign that he is preparing himself, both privately and with his political allies, to be eased off the ticket.

The pledge from the Vice President was given to a group of conservative congressmen headed by Rep. Samuel L. Devine of Ohio, who frequently—and secretly—meet with top administration officials about political matters.

Dinner at the Twin Bridges Motel was largely uneventful as Agnew discussed routine matters, touching on his forthcoming

trip to Greece. The drama came when one of the congressmen asked Agnew for assurance that he would be Mr. Nixon's running-mate.

AGNEW'S ANSWER was long and well thought-out. He recalled the threat to Mr. Nixon's own renomination in 1956 and his decision to fight to stay on the Eisenhower ticket. He praised Mr. Nixon for having refused to buckle to liberals who wanted to dump him.

But 1956 was far different from 1972, Agnew went on. In 1956, President Eisenhower was certain of re-election. Not so, he said, for Mr. Nixon in 1972.

With only 43 per cent of the vote in 1968, President Nixon would need every asset he could get his hands on to be re-elected next year, Agnew said. One such asset could be a vice president nominee not named Spiro Agnew.

After dropping that word, a bombshell to Devine and his pro-Agnew Republican cohorts, Agnew listened as one after another in his audience rose to predict party disaster if Agnew were dropped from the ticket. Agnew strongly dissented. There would be no "dump-

ing," he said. Rather, he himself would insist on a replacement if polls and other political data showed that he would be a drag on the ticket.

TO ALL PROTESTS, Agnew was utterly immune. When he fielded the last question, he was given a standing ovation. At least some in his audience carried away the distinct feeling that Agnew had no mental reservation about what he had just said: In effect, that his words were more in the nature of a prediction than a remote possibility.

That feeling, moreover, is shared by some of the most astute politicians who have entree to Mr. Nixon's White House. They reason that the chief attraction of Agnew on Mr. Nixon's 1972 presidential ticket is to put the icing on the cake of the President's Southern strategy. But they now think the cake may need no icing.

The President finally has redeemed his pledge to powerful Southern textile interests to stem textile imports from Japan. Each of his six nominations to the Supreme Court, two of them defeated in the Senate, carried out his 1968 pledge for strict

constructionist justices satisfying to the South. By repeated and angry denunciations of public school busing to advance racial desegregation, Mr. Nixon and his top aides have ingratiated themselves with the South. Finally, the White House now believes that the odds are better than even that Gov. George Wallace of Alabama will not try another third-party presidential race.

BUT IN ADDITION to these clear political gains in the South, all of which tend to reduce Agnew's importance to the ticket, the White House is on the receiving end these days of strong enthusiasm from Republican businessmen for Democrat Connally to replace Agnew.

Nor is Connally anathema to the South, as one Southern Republican who was in Agnew's audience that evening told us: "If it's Connally instead of Agnew, we could accept that in the South."

The President, of course, will make no decisions for many months. But as of now, Agnew has convinced his political allies that, if the President's decision is against him, he will go out like a lamb.

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## THE PRESIDENCY

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### BY HUGH SIDNEY

# The worries on a traveler's mind

The odysseys of Vice-President Spiro Agnew go on—this time from sumptuous Persepolis, where he helped the shah of Iran celebrate 2,500 years of Persian civilization, to Gargalianoi, his father's old hometown in Greece, six hairpin turns above the Ionian Sea. In Gargalianoi, his cousins run the hardware store a block from the Anagnostopoulos family home, which stands on the corner of Aristotle and Socrates Streets.

Agnew seems preoccupied. He hasn't been as sullen as he was on his around-the-world junket last summer, but he is still an essentially joyless participant in the rituals of diplomacy, which require eager civility. It is true that he had an upset stomach out in the desert among all those ruins, and that might turn anyone off. Agnew's attitude, however, seems to spring from deeper concerns. He is worried about keeping his job, and has confessed as much to intimates. What Agnew needs is a political miracle that would vault Nixon far out in front of all his political opponents. Then Agnew could be retained, sour disposition and all, to go on raising money and his own particular brand of hell—about the only duties that seem to get the Vice-President's juices flowing these days.

In Republican precincts they like to blame the Democrats and the press for raising the question about Agnew's future, about whether or not Nixon might dump him. It took Lyndon Johnson's new book of memoirs to remind everybody of a fascinating vignette in history that has been obscured by the assassination of John Kennedy and the tumultuous years since then.

On Nov. 21, 1963, Richard M. Nixon, a

retired politician but a working lawyer, was in Dallas for a board meeting of Pepsi-Cola. Board Director Joan Crawford was the star of the hour, holding court in the Baker Hotel. Down the hall, Nixon settled into a modest suite by himself. Carl Freund, a reporter on the *Dallas Morning News*, decided to go around and see what an ex-Vice-President had to say about the approach of another presidential year. Nixon was glad to see the correspondent, and after the photographers snapped a couple of pictures, the two were alone just chatting, rambling off in a dozen directions. Nixon's main point was that despite disagreement with Kennedy's policies, the people of Dallas owed the President of the United States full respect and courtesy.

A couple of times Freund suggested that he might be taking too much of Nixon's time, but, no, Nixon wanted to talk on. Did Nixon suppose, ventured Freund, that after Kennedy had served out his two terms, Lyndon Johnson might be the Democrats' presidential candidate? The fact that Kennedy and Johnson were together in Texas indicated that Kennedy planned to keep Johnson on the ticket, Nixon said, and another term as V.P. might indeed position him for the presidency.

Then he offered another thought: "But we must remember that President Kennedy and his advisers are practical politicians. I believe that if they think the race is a shoo-in, they will keep Lyndon. Otherwise, I think they will choose someone who can help the Democratic ticket. . . . Lyndon was chosen in 1960 because he could help the ticket in the South. Now he is becom-





The Vice-President places a wreath on the grave of his grandfather in Gargalianoi, the village of Agnew's Greek ancestors.

ing a political liability in the South, just as he is in the North.”

Back at his office, Freund put the dump-Johnson possibility in the lead of his story. On the morning of Nov. 22, 1963 the story appeared back in the fourth section, unnoticed by a city getting ready to welcome Jack and Jackie. In a few hours Nixon was winging away from Dallas, and in a few more hours tragedy overwhelmed everything.

So there was the old master himself, laying down the rules of the Vice-President game. By those standards, Agnew has not done very well as he approaches 1972, the time of judgment. In a startlingly frank interview that appears in Allen Drury's new Nixon book, the Vice-President relates how the Senate had refused to accommodate itself to his manners. They cut his prepared four-minute inaugural speech (he is the constitutional presiding officer of the Senate) down to two minutes. It was “like a slap in the face.” Some Senate members accused him of trying to influence votes. “And so, after trying for a while to get along with the Senate, I decided I would go down to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and try playing the Executive game,” said Agnew.

The Executive game has not gone well either. A Lou Harris poll a few weeks ago showed Agnew at an all-time national low, 35% approved of him, 52% disapproved. Furthermore, the South, by which Nixon

sets so much store, gave Agnew a 47% negative rating. When pitted against John Connally, Secretary of the Treasury, Connally was preferred as Vice-President by 52% to 36% in the whole nation, and by 50% to 37% in the South. When they got that poll in the White House, a lot of Nixon's men were surprised, but only a few displeased.

That may explain why a fortnight ago Agnew was off in the Mediterranean, while down in North Carolina in the Billy Graham Day motorcade, a few cars behind the President's limousine, came John Connally waving to the folks like he was running for something.