

Page
5/23/70

Agnew: 'I Intend to be Heard'

This is the text of a speech given by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew last night before a Texas Republican fund-raising dinner in Houston, Tex.

Lately, you have been exposed to a great deal of public comment about vice presidential rhetoric and how I should "cool it." The President is getting this advice daily from many quarters . . . some of them inside the government. But mostly it has come from persons who have been in the target area of some of my speeches. Nowhere is the complaint louder than in the columns and editorials of the liberal news media of this country, those really illiberal, self-appointed guardians of our destiny who would like to run the country without ever submitting to the elective process as we in public office must do.

The President has refused to curb my statements on behalf of this administration's policies, or to tell me what words to use or what tone to take in my speeches. And on my part, I have refused to "cool it"—to use the vernacular—until those self-righteous lower their voices a few decibels. This, I am sure, they are unwilling to do, and there is too much at stake in the nation for us to leave the entire field of public commentary to them.

I can assure you that some of these pundits make my rhetoric seem tame. Here are a few recent, random samples I have collected to share with you tonight. These are the people who never tire of telling a President how he should run the nation's affairs. I hope you will overlook the slightly hysterical tone of some of their comments. They are overwrought because their advice is not heeded by the President with any degree of regularity.

The Washington Post, which constantly urges us to lower our voices, said after the President's detailed address to the nation on his decision to clean out the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia:

"There is something so erratic and irrational, not to say incomprehensible, about all this that you have to assume there is more to it than he is telling us."

The Post may as well have come right out and said that it thought the President had lost his sanity. Words like "erratic, irrational, incomprehensible" are not ordinarily used to describe a carefully studied military decision by the nation's Commander-in-Chief.

And when the President referred to some college-based criminals as bums—these were people who had burned up a professor's life work—the Post was beside itself. It culminated as follows:

"A gratuitous clop . . . a page from Vice President Agnew's copybook . . . campus unrest is simply being fanned and exploited by the administration . . . Hate the dissidents, excoriate the 'bums,' see if you can match Mr. Agnew in hurling names at them."

That was the hysterical view from the Post's Ivory Tower where that master of sick invective, Herbblock also works. He reached a new low with a cartoon showing a National Guardsman in the aftermath of the Kent State tragedy with a box of live ammu-

munition—each bullet bearing a phrase from my speeches. Except one. That bullet was labeled "college bums" in honor of the President.

And they ask us to cool the rhetoric and lower our voices.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the Washington-New York axis, the New York Times was thoughtfully contemplating events.

A "military hallucination," it called the President's decision and it sternly warned one and all: "If the President does not promptly pull back from this dangerous adventure, Congress will have to assert its constitutional powers of restraint."

The Times columnists were less restrained. Anthony Lewis, writing from London, said:

"The President of the United States, in a maudlin personalization and simplification of complex political issues, makes war a test of his own and the nation's manhood . . . By this action President Nixon has calculatedly chosen to widen the division among the American people, to inflame instead of heal."

And Tom Wicker, the soft-spoken boy wonder of the opinion molders, said with disdain:

"Whatever his motives and his policy, Mr. Nixon relied heavily, in his appearances before the nation, on deception, demagoguery and chauvinism."

James Reston, the Times' premier columnist, writing from Washington on May 10, after the weekend of student demonstrations, saw fit to equate me with Jerry Rubin as an extremist. Mr. Reston did not bother to amplify on this comparison.

But so that the Times and its editors and columnists can be kept in proper perspective, I would like to quote to you a few comments that the incendiary Mr. Rubin made on the Kent State campus one month prior to the confrontation that brought the student deaths there. The Akron Beacon Journal reported that he told an audience of 1,500:

"Until you people are prepared to kill your parents you aren't ready for the revolution . . ."

"The American school system will be ended in two years. We are going to bring it down. Quit being students. Become criminals. We have to disrupt every institution and break every law . . ."

"Do you people want a diploma or to take this school over and use it for your own purposes? . . . It's quiet here now but things are going to start again."

To suggest that I am guilty of this type of incendiarism is in keeping with the irresponsibility that the Times manages to achieve on its editorial page. And it is appropriate that the slur be cast by Mr. Reston, who delights in calling other people demagogues.

Earlier, the Times had deplored what it called "the Administration's open exploitation of fear and discord" and had said "there is a disturbing appeal to the nation's lowest instincts in the present Administration's descent to gutter fighting."

And they ask us to cool the rhetoric and lower our voices!

While the President's move on behalf of our troops in Vietnam caused shivers at the Washington Post and New York Times, it brought apoplexy in some of the other misnamed bastions of liberalism in this country.

The New Republic, in a rare front-page editorial, said this week:

"Richard Nixon is going down in history, all right, but not soon enough . . ."

It used such terms as "transparently phony . . . fraud . . . mean contempt . . . driven . . . disorderly . . . secretive . . . dangerous" to describe the President's actions.

"How is this country to get through the next 2½ years without flying apart?" the magazine asked.

I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly, another strident voice of illiberalism commented:

"The race is on between protest and disaster . . . The only hope is that the students can create such a Plague for Peace, swarming like locusts into the halls of Congress, that they stop all other business and make an end to the war the No. 1 concern it ought to be. The slogan of the striking students ought to be: Suspend Classes and Educate the Country."

During the frenzy following the Cambodian action, which news media invective helped fan instead of cool it, was not even safe to visit the South.

Some of you may recall that I substituted for the President in dedicating the massive new Stone Mountain Memorial to Generals Lee and Jackson and Jefferson Davis near Atlanta on May 9.

The Atlanta Constitution, which doesn't care much for me anyway, decided I was unfit for the honor. They put it in stronger terms, saying it was "a shame and a disgrace" that I was making that address.

The editorial continued:

"Honorable men ride that rocky ledge . . . Spiro Agnew has none of those redeeming qualities. He has the grace of a drill sergeant and the understanding of a 19th century prison camp warden."

Not even the Arkansas Gazette, which views me with varying degrees of horror from its position on the extreme left, has matched the rhetoric of that tribute. Or at least, I haven't seen it if it has. I only see those clippings from the Gazette that are forwarded to me by Senator Fulbright . . . And sometimes Martha Mitchell.

LIFE's expert on the presidency — or I should say it's leading expert, Hugh Sidey — pictured the President as acting from "a kind of splendid and angry isolation in the oval office, a deliberate defiance of a large and growing number of Americans and their institutions."

Mr. Sidey was even less charitable about the Vice President.

"For weeks now," he said, "Agnew, more than Abbie Hoffman or William Kunstler, has dominated the headlines with a torrent of abuse that served mainly to call attention to all that is bad in our society — or what he takes to be bad . . . laying about with that big careless brush of his against the administration's lengthening list of enemies."

Now I leave it to your judgment. Who is

the real critic of America today? Who rails against our system and our institutions — suggesting we are a racist, imperialistic society? Is it LIFE magazine or the Vice President?

But for pure unbridled invective, you will have to look far to beat that of the excitable columnist, television commentator and former Ambassador to Finland, Carl T. Rowan. Mr. Rowan might once have used diplomatic language, but he long ago lost the art and his rhetoric is anything but cool.

In one recent column about me, he employed these phrases:

"rose above his own laziness and ineptitude"

"a dumb joke — a sort of aberration of history"

"he has come to personify all the class conflict, the racial hostility, the cultural and generational gaps that have transformed this society into a tinderbox"

"calculated maliciousness"

"prefers to pander to the prejudices of the most ignorant and selfish elements in society."

And Mr. Rowan could not resist joining Herblock and others in suggesting that I had something to do with the deaths of the Kent State students. Quote:

"Incredibly, even as four Kent students lay in the morgue and others lay critically wounded in hospitals, the Vice President's trigger-happy tongue was still firing buckshot."

But the most vicious attempt to transfer the blame for the Kent State student deaths that I have read was in the illiberal New York Post, by columnist Peter Hamill.

Listen to his irrational raving:

"When you call campus dissenters 'bums', as Nixon did the other day, you should not be surprised when they are shot through the head and the chest by National Guardsmen. Nixon is as responsible for the Kent State slaughter as he and the rest of his bloodless gang of corporation men were for the anti-integration violence in Lamar, and for the pillage and murder that is taking place in the name of democracy in Cambodia . . . At Kent State, two boys and two girls were shot to death by men unleashed by a President's slovenly rhetoric. If that's the brave new America, to hell with it."

Or if you care for a distaff view from that same organ, here's Harriet Van Horne:

"The president's . . . TV presentation of

this decision was, moreover, maudlin, crafty and stained by fulsome sentiments."

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard a lot of wild, hot rhetoric tonight — none of it mine. This goes on daily in the editorial pages of some very large, very reputable newspapers in this country — not all of them in the East by a long shot and it pours out of the television set and the radio in a daily torrent, assailing our ears so incessantly we no longer register shock at the irresponsibility and thoughtlessness behind the statements.

"But you are the Vice President," they say to me. "You should choose your language more carefully."

Nonsense. I have sworn I will uphold the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Those who would tear our country apart or try to bring down its gov-

ernment are enemies, whether here or abroad, whether destroying libraries and classrooms on a college campus, or firing at American troops from a rice paddy in South-east Asia.

I have an obligation to all of the people of the United States to call things as I see them, and I have an obligation to the President to support his actions in the best manner that I can. I choose my own words, and I set the tone of my speeches. As he said at his recent press conference, I am responsible for what I say. And I intend to be heard above the din even if it means raising my voice.

Nothing would be more pleasing to some of the editors and columnists I have quoted tonight than to have me simply shut up and disappear.

Nothing would be more pleasing to those on the campus whose motives I have challenged. They are, for the most part, not the great body of students who are trying honestly to get an education. They are rather a small hard core of hell-raisers who want to overturn the system for the sake of chaos alone. They burn, pillage and destroy because they rebel against their lack of creativity. Although they are few in number, they have had a shattering impact. Unfortunately, they are encouraged by an equally small number of faculty members who apparently cannot compete legitimately within the system or do not choose to do so.

It is my honest opinion that this hard core of faculty and students should be identified and dismissed from the otherwise healthy body of the college community lest they, like a cancer, destroy it.

Peaceful dissent, yes! Violence, no!

Reasonable debate, yes! Street rioting, no!

Orderly change, yes! Throw out the system, no!

Some others who would be just as pleased if I lapsed into a more traditional vice presidential silence are in the Congress — the isolationists in the Senate, who seek at every turn to thwart the President's efforts to conclude this country's involvement in Vietnam, in a manner which will prevent

that part of the world from falling to Communist aggression. These senators are well intentioned, and most of them have been on the Washington scene far longer than I, but I'm afraid this has narrowed their viewpoint. They should get out in the country. It would improve their vision and their sense of reality. Most Americans, I believe, fully realize that this country can never again withdraw to its shorelines and survive. That is the lesson of history that some have failed to learn or have too soon forgotten. The President desperately needs a Republican Congress to replace these neo-isolationist views and remove the willful obstruction of his programs.

Finally a word about a third group that has received some attention in my speeches — the electronic news media. I have tried tonight to be specific in my criticism. I realize I have left out many who are in the business of second-guessing the President, and who should have been included. I hope we can get around to them later. But I also recognize there are many others in the news profession — a group upon whom the country has to depend for an honest report of what is going on in this world — and that they are attempting to live up to this responsibility, most of them successfully. I exclude them totally from the criticism I make here. And I compliment them for doing their jobs well under strong counter pressures, often within their own office and among less responsible colleagues.

It does bother me, however, that the press — as a group — regards the First Amendment as its own private preserve. Every time I criticize what I consider to be excesses or faults in the news business, I am accused of repression, and the leaders of the various media professional groups wave the First Amendment as they denounce me. That happens to be my amendment, too. It guarantees my free speech as much as it does their freedom of the press. So I hope that will be remembered the next time a "muzzle Agnew" campaign is launched. There is room for all of us — and for our divergent views — under the First Amendment.