



Joseph Kraft

Agnew's Campaign Role

EUGENE McCARTHY'S wisecrack about Vice President Agnew being "Nixon's Nixon" provides a useful corrective to the exaggerated hullabaloo over Agnew's role in the coming election. For despite all the Republican ballyhoo and the Democratic groaning, Agnew is still second banana.

The top banana is Mr. Nixon. And matters have been arranged so that it will be possible for Mr. Nixon to be very active around election time, speaking on matters of vital national interest as a nonpartisan President of all the people.

To be sure, the Vice President is not going to be mute and invisible. Once again he will make heard in the land the familiar cry that the Democrats are "squishy-soft" when it comes to standing up to the Commies. There will ring out anew the charge that they don't have the guts to deal with racial violence and campus unrest. Similarly with the accusation that they are permissive about drugs, pornography, and long-hair.

BUT MOST of this preaching will be addressed to the true believers. Agnew is the man for getting Republican fat cats to ante up the big ones at fund-raisers. His stuff is the stuff the troops need to go out and fight harder. And that could be important in the smaller states of the South and West where the Democrats are on the defensive and a mood of stupefied ennui about politics seems guaranteed to yield a low turnout.

But Agnew is not everywhere the political equivalent of Aladdin's lamp. In New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Texas, he is apt to scare off

the moderate voters Republican candidates need to go over the top. In Ohio he cannot undo the big issue, which is Republican corruption. In Illinois he cannot greatly harm the Senate bid of Adlai Stevenson who has the insulation of Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. Nor is there much he can do in California that Ronald Reagan can't do better.

The man who can make a dent in these states is the President himself. He can do it, as he did last year in the New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial elections, by addressing himself to the nation on the grave issues of peace and war. And the key function for the Vice President now, as it was when Mr. Nixon was Vice President to Dwight D. Eisenhower, is to underline by contrasting behavior the President's special status as statesman of high principle.

That explains the Agnew overkill. It explains why one week Agnew kicks the stuffings out of Sens. George McGovern and Mark Hatfield and their proposed deadline for troop withdrawal from Vietnam, while the next week the administration issues only the mildest comment on the same proposal as made by Sen. Edmund S. Muskie. It explains why Agnew paints Democratic National Chairman Lawrence O'Brien in the blackest terms only days after President Nixon hails him as one of the architects of postal reform.

Moreover, as Murrey Marder has pointed out, there occur right around election time several occasions for presidential appeals to the nation. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with Russia resume in Helsinki on

Nov. 2 — the day before elections. On Nov. 5, the 90-day cease-fire in the Mideast expires. And Oct. 15 is terminal date for the latest installment on troop withdrawal from Vietnam.

Depending on the turn of events, the President can use any of these occasions as a peg for going to the country, either as a man of peace or as the sturdy bulwark in a tough and dangerous world. Thus the Democrats don't only have Agnew to fight this fall. They have to arm themselves against the far more formidable figure of President Nixon.

© 1970, Publishers-Hall Syndicate