

## The Vice President of All The People

The Vice Presidency, as Spiro T. Agnew seems to see the office, is multi-faceted in its responsibilities. By no means confined, as some have conceived it, to ceremonial observances, to presiding when convenient over the sessions of the Senate and to preparing for the possibility, should the melancholy need arise, of succeeding to the Presidency, Mr. Agnew regards himself as an all-purpose censor or commentator (a sort of editorial writer in ermine, as it were) appointed to speak out as guide, counselor, moralist, critic or scourge whenever the vagaries of his fellow-citizens invite his judgment.

And so it was that he felt obliged on Monday to loose one of his thunderbolts at Congressman William R. Anderson of Tennessee who had preached a sort of sermon on Sunday to the Board of the National Council of Churches assembled in Louisville, Kentucky. The essence of Mr. Anderson's homily to the churchmen was that they ought to "dampen any violent potential in our society" by diluting "the anger of our youth, the dissent of our brothers, with the maturity of our convictions and the authority of the gospels." And somewhat rhetorically and ambiguously, the Congressman said "We must take our churches into the streets."

Mr. Anderson is a partisan of the brothers Berrigan, Catholic priests now in prison for having destroyed some draft records and under indictment for alleged participation in a conspiracy to kidnap Dr. Henry Kissinger, a White House adviser. Six weeks or more ago, and a month before a grand jury indicted the Berrigans, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had publicly accused the two priests of being leaders in the conspiracy; and Congressman Anderson had in turn committed the ultimate *in lese majeste* by accusing the FBI chief of "tactics reminiscent of McCarthyism."

So all of this is what led the Vice President to let go with the following: "There has been a recent gratuitous statement by a high government official that criticizes the head of the FBI, calls for nationwide demonstrations against the indictment, and characterizes the defendants as heroes . . . Impugning the motives of that Grand Jury and the investigative agencies which brought the mat-

ter to their attention—in other words, popping off for political advantage prior to the trial—is nearly as reprehensible as finding the defendants guilty before they have been tried and convicted. What it amounts to is a vote of no confidence in our judicial institutions, and it ill becomes a member of the Congress. Moreover, the incident is stimulative of a recent trend that unjustly downgrades law enforcement officers and the American system of criminal justice."

Now, that's what we call a "gratuitous statement by a high government official", and just in passing we call your attention to the item, For the Record, printed elsewhere on this page, which gives you a rough idea of how easily this sort of thing can catch a fellow up in rather serious contradictions with his own boss. The Vice President was not delivering a sermon or performing any of the ritual duties required of him. Nobody, so far as we can tell, asked his views on Congressman Anderson's views. He simply issued a statement—a statement of a sort which he did not see fit to issue when Mr. Hoover did his "popping off". It is a statement, we submit, that says rather more than a Vice President of all the people really ought to say.

Apart from its injustices to Mr. Anderson who, by no reasonable distortion of his remarks, can be said to have called for nationwide demonstrations or to have impugned the motives of a grand jury or of any investigative agencies, Mr. Agnew needs to learn that criticism of American government institutions, judicial, executive or legislative, is far from a vote of no confidence in them and very far indeed from being unbecoming to a member of the Congress. The American political system is a system which derives its strength and its efficiency from internal criticism, the best antidote ever distilled for the poisons of bureaucratic arrogance, official certitude and pontification from on high. Mr. Agnew himself is, of course, entitled to full participation in the process. But he ought to understand that he is not the state; he is no more than one of its fallible, temporary representatives, perhaps in the right, perhaps in the wrong. And he ought to know, too, that the process itself is the best possible preventive against violence.