

China Visit Criticized

By Agnew

By David Kraslow ²⁰
and Jules Witcover ⁷¹
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April 19 — Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, in an off-the-record, three-hour meeting early this morning with nine reporters, complained that the United States took a propaganda beating on the recent visit of American table tennis players to Communist China.

Agnew, here for the spring Republican governors' conference, criticized some of the American reporting of that visit and expressed disagreement with some facets of the administration's policy of easing relations with the Peking regime.

He told the reporters he'd unsuccessfully argued his position at one National Security Council meeting before the admission of the table tennis players.

Agnew said he felt the United States had been trapped by the Chinese invitation to the players and that the visit was a mistake because, among other reasons, it might tend to undermine American support for the Nationalist Chinese government on Taiwan.

He suggested to the reporters that an administration policy that might seem to be too eager to embrace a long-time foe of the United States could adversely affect American public opinion regarding Taiwan.

Agnew singled out for criticism a story from Red China by John Roderick of the Associated Press Tokyo Bureau, who accompanied the American players and who was formerly stationed in mainland China. Roderick credited Peking with a diplomatic coup for using second-string players against the Americans, thus avoiding humiliation of the less experienced Americans.

The Vice President specifically expressed distaste for Roderick's use of the word "exquisite" in describing the move.

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Roderick reported that a match between American 18,000 fans in Peking "could be described as an exquisite display of Chinese tact and politeness to guests."

Much of the meeting with Agnew was given over to a two-way discussion of the performance of the American press in a spirit of serious and polite exchange in which, at times, the Vice President was complimentary of reporters and critical of newspaper management.

The marathon meeting came about at the invitation of Agnew. One of his aides contacted the reporters, rousing at least one of them from bed shortly after midnight to ask him to come to the Vice President's suite at the Williamsburg Lodge.

The meeting began at 12:30 over drinks and broke up about 3:30 in the morning. In addition to the Vice President and the nine reporters, three Agnew aides sat in—Victor Gold, Roy Goodearle and Pete Malatesta.

The ground rules for the meeting—that the Vice President's remarks were to be completely off the record—were spelled out with unusual clarity and emphasis. As a result, reporters who attended felt particularly bound not to reveal what the Vice President said.

Los Angeles Times reporters were not present at the meeting and therefore were not a party to the agreement [The Washington Post was not present at the meeting either.] Attempts to question the Vice President on information concerning the meeting were turned aside by Gold.

Gold acknowledged that the meeting had been held but said it would be futile to relay

questions about it to Agnew because of the stringent off-the-record understanding.

Among the other subjects discussed at the meeting was the Vice President's role in the 1970 congressional campaign. He acknowledged to the nine reporters that he had been hurt by the campaign, in which he was the spearhead of the Nixon administration's drive to oust congressional foes, and the loudest voice in a strident law-and-order theme many Republicans felt backfired.

Agnew indicated he had an assigned role and had to take a beating if that was necessary. Concerning his political future, he said he is not worried whether he will be on the Republican national ticket again in 1972.

This is the second straight time at a Republican governor's conference that Agnew has held an off-the-record meeting with possibly embarrassing consequences because of leaks.

In Sun Valley, Idaho, in December, the Vice President in a three-hour private discussion with Republican governors, accused the press of driving a wedge between him and the governors. He circulated newspaper clippings to make his point.