

## 12/28/74 The Vice President Strikes Again

"Four days before the President's speech, Senator Muskie had said, I believe the federal government should cut taxes now . . . the federal government should establish an independent price-wage guidelines board.' Three days after the President's address, after his long silence had begun to disturb some of his supporters, Senator Muskie criticized the President's 'excessive reliance upon relief for large industry.' He added that the call for budget cuts to keep the deficit from getting larger was 'bad economics and bad social policy.'"

The remarks, as you might have guessed, come from a recent speech by Vice President Agnew, and—nattering nabobwise—they are pretty baffling. For Mr. Agnew, as is evident from his full text, believes that he has caught Senator Muskie in a contradiction—some overnight, expedient switch of views, consistent only in their criticism of the President. Is the establishment of an independent price-wage guidelines board (which Sen. Muskie favored August 11) inconsistent with opposition to federal budget cuts (which the senator expressed on August 18)? Is the August 11 call for cutting taxes in conflict with the August 18 complaint that Mr. Nixon's tax relief program for large

industry was excessive? It might be if the senator on August 11 had been talking about business taxes. But in fact he was talking about speeding up already enacted *personal* income tax cuts, as a look at his text makes plain.

We are further perplexed by Mr. Agnew's apparent impatience with Senator Muskie's three-day silence, since somewhere along the line we got the idea that the Vice President was ill-disposed to "instant" comment. But let it pass; what really boggles the mind is that Mr. Agnew should be dwelling on switches and inconsistencies of statement before and after August 15 at all. If he takes us down that road, then surely the administration which brought off one of the most abrupt and dramatic reversals of economic policy in living memory stands to—how shall we say?—suffer by comparison, to lose the contest quote for quote. In a risqué moment, Mr. Agnew sought to explain the sinister meaning, as he saw it, of the Muskie remarks he had cited: "The view of some politicians toward the presidency is 'damned if you don't and damned if you do.'" Damned if we know why he brought the subject up in the first place.