

The New Agnew: His Style Has

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

Vice President Spiro Agnew declared last week that he had changed his style instead of his substance, and he was as good as his word.

In his opening campaign swing of 1972 the Vice President brought to the great midland of America a message of Republican firmness in dealing with enemies both foreign and domestic. Without using the rhetoric that made his name a household word, Agnew showed that his essential perspectives on crime, the war, and the nation's defense posture have not changed much in the vice presidency.

At the dedication of one of the most modern juvenile rehabilitation centers in America, the Vice President reaffirmed his view that individuals, not society, are responsible for crime and he added:

"An offense against society is an offense against every citizen, and certain heinous crimes must be punished with unrelenting severity."

That was in St. Louis. Speaking on the Vietnam war in the same city, Agnew said:

"We became involved in Vietnam because of acts of international banditry by the North Vietnamese . . . Let us direct our contempt for war against those who started it. Let us not become muddle-minded because of fatigue and thereby swallow enemy propaganda."

More Agnew on the war, this time from a press conference in Minneapolis:

"I think that the North Vietnamese have finally assimilated a belief that we are serious about not leaving this war and abandoning our cognizance of the 55,000 Americans killed in action and countless hundreds of

over

THE WASHINGTON

Changed but Not

POST Sunday, Sept. 24, 1972

A 3

His Views

thousands Vietnamese . . . simply on the basis that we are very tired of it."

What had changed in Agnew last week, as he had predicted to the press, was his style of public speaking. Gone was the avalanche of alliteration such as "hopeless hysterical hypochondriacs of history" or "negative nabobs of negativism" with which Agnew had titillated his followers in other seasons. Gone were the attacks on the press. Gone, in Agnew's words, was "the attack position" in favor of a "much more broad approach to the issues and much less of a response to what the other fellow is doing."

When Agnew mentioned "the other fellow," by whom he always meant McGovern and not vice presidential nominee Sargeant Shriver,

he took pains to point out his belief in McGovern's "sincerity."

The only deviation from this, other than mild jokes about McGovern behaving as if he were Sen. Edward Kennedy's running mate, occurred in St. Louis, where he used the "white flag of surrender" phrase applied to Senator McGovern by Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird.

On this occasion, Agnew was careful to quote Laird. When the Vice President was asked at a subsequent press conference whether the phrase violated his own pledge to discuss issues and avoid personalities, Agnew replied that it was "a fair analysis by Mr. Laird . . . (who) is the most directly involved person in matters of national defense."

Agnew did not de-empha-

size his "attack style" of campaigning by words alone. The form of his new campaign style has been carefully molded by a staff that pays scrupulous attention to acoustics, lighting and the candidate's appearance.

In the cities he visits, Agnew accepts no studio television appearances or newspaper interviews. He limits his press availability in each city to a single "all media press conference" at which the Vice President sits comfortably in a chair and answers questions in a relaxed, informal matter. Photographers are told in advance to use available light and avoid flashbulbs or other shadow-heightening lighting aids.

The Agnew press conference in Columbus was arranged with a soft velvet blue chair, dark blue velvet drapes and a vase of fresh flowers.

"There also ought to be a sign that says 'home sweet home,'" cracked one unappreciative television reporter.

As it turned out, the flowers seemed a little stogy to Agnew's press secretary, Victor God, who carried them away before the Vice President entered.

Flowers or not, the Vice President's staff makes no secret that its thoughtfully designed news conferences are intended to stress Agnew's new mode of campaigning. It is a method, Agnew says, that suits him better than his rhetoric of the past, and that also particularly suits the campaign in which he is now engaged.

The public Agnew, wrote M. Stanton Evans in a recent issue of "National Review," is somehow "aristocratic," and added:

"For a 'Middle-American' type, Agnew comes over as a



Associated Press

Vice President and Mrs. Agnew shake hands with supporters at campaign cocktail party.

cool and cerebral customer."

Despite these qualities and his new found style, Agnew has lost none of his ability to create controversy wherever he goes.

He created two controversies in a single Minneapolis news conference last week, and walked into another,

not of his own making, in St. Louis.

In Minneapolis, Agnew explained in detail that he was changing only his style and would not apologize for anything he has said in the past.

"I am also trying to place emphasis in this campaign

on very well established, logical and substantial positions I can substantiate because I have lived with them and believe in them and my record is there to prove it," Agnew added.

Moments later, Agnew sprang on the press a self-proclaimed "wild fancy" that some of the accused conspirators in the Watergate case had allowed themselves to be caught wiretapping Democratic headquarters in an effort to embarrass the Nixon administration. He called this account "a personal theory that I can't substantiate."

Agnew continued to repeat this theory in response to reporters' questions at the next two news conferences, even while saying that he did not like to discuss the case because it was necessary to protect the rights of the accused.

At the Minneapolis press conference Agnew also surprised reporters by informing them that the FBI was investigating the wheat deal between the United States and the Soviet Union to see if any grain exporters had been tipped off in advance, as the Democrats had charged.

The White House insists that an investigation was scheduled to be launched but was not yet underway. What happened is that Agnew chatted briefly with Budget Director Caspar Weinberger about the issue before the press conference and then inadvertently announced an inquiry that was supposedly confidential.

In St. Louis, where Agnew seemed to be minding his own business, the Vice Pres-

ident's speech at the juvenile center became a subject of controversy.

The Vice President was greeted by a newspaper story alleging that judges who had played the major role in pushing through the center had been excluded from the dedication because they were Democrats with no fondness for Agnew.

Eventually, the disgruntled Democrats were mollified by inclusion in the program. One of them rescued the day for Agnew by declaring that he was a supporter of the Vice President who hoped that the reporter who wrote the story would be hit by "an errant golf ball."

The St. Louis situation could have happened to anyone, and the "wild fancy" of the Watergate bugging fits perfectly with administration strategy of suggesting that the issue has been overblown by the Democrats for partisan reasons.

But the Agnew statement on the wheat investigation, at best a premature announcement, raised anew the question of whether the White House would insist on closely overseeing the Agnew campaign, as it did in 1968 after a variety of controversies.

So far, Agnew appears to be on a trial run without direct White House intervention, even though his schedule is carefully coordinated with the White House and with the surrogate scheduling conducted by the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The Vice President is "the President's man, and not a competing political entity," Agnew said in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention. Like other vice presidents in the recent past, however, Agnew has a need to appear as much his own man as possible, particularly if he is to emerge as a presidential candidate for 1976.

Thus, his aides are consistently vague about the degree of White House campaign direction or the identity of those who coordinate the presidential and vice presidential scheduling. Agnew emphasizes his independence, and told reporters last week that he had proposed his new style of campaigning and that "the President agreed with my decision."

From Agnew's point of view, there seems little doubt that the decision, whoever made it, was a desirable one. The Vice President is a celebrity now, without the need of rhetoric to attract attention, and he is clearly being sized up as a probable candidate for President.

Agnew dismisses with one-word negative answers any reportorial suggestions that his campaigning is being conducted with 1976 in mind. But he appeared pleased when he entered a St. Louis Hotel last week and was greeted with a sign, "Spiro is the Spirit of '76."

At the Ohio Republican convention in Columbus, a

group of Agnew supporters briefly appended the cry of "eight more years" to the familiar Nixon re-election cheer of "four more years." Despite a speech that carefully broke no new ground and only occasionally denounced the Democratic ticket, Agnew was interrupted by applause 29 times.

Agnew's speeches to less-partisan audiences were greeted by attentiveness rather than by applause. But like the Ohio Republican convention, his audiences appeared to know where Agnew stood on the issues.

Before the International City Management Association in Minneapolis, Agnew was applauded only when he departed from his prepared text to denounce "the direct funding of inexperienced people . . . who sometimes work at counterpurposes to the professionals in government."

Agnew said later he had community action and community development groups in mind as well as "some of the legal services organizations, particularly where they use the funds of politically inspired social reform rather than assistance to the poor."

It was the kind of statement Agnew could have made as governor of Maryland or in his subsequent campaigns.

As Agnew had candidly proclaimed, it's a "question of emphasis and style . . . not a question of walking away from what I said before."