

Capitol Punishment

Sourcerers

By Art Buchwald

One of the big problems a newspaperman in this city has is when he speaks to one unnamed source who contradicts what another unnamed source has told him.

Last week all of us struggled with the dilemma. An unnamed source told The Washington Post that a Vice President of the United States was going to resign. Another unnamed source, when contacted, denied it. The big question was who was telling the truth.

The first thing that we had to find out was whether The Post's source was a *reliable* unnamed source. Since we didn't know the unnamed source's name, this was very difficult to do.

There was speculation among many unnamed people in Washington that the unnamed source The Washington Post quoted about the Vice President's resignation came from an unmarked building at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. If it did, that could give it some authenticity. At the same time, so many unnamed sources in this building have been caught in out-and-out lies, that the very fact that it originated there might force many of us to discount it.

A source close to the Oval Office denied the unnamed source worked there or at San Clemente. But an unnamed intimate of the Vice President said he strongly suspected that the story was planted with The Post to force the V.P. to resign.

When I had discussed this information with an official high in government circles who asked not to be quoted, he said that the Vice President in question had discussed resignation with many Republican officials whose names he could not give. The consensus was that while he had discussed resignation with some unnamed sources, he had also discussed remaining in office with others. Therefore, it's quite possible that the source that The Washington Post talked to was telling the truth

as far as he knew it.

Anonymous supporters of a former Texas governor who just became a Republican denied that their people were behind the story. "Our man has no desire to be Vice President of the United States," a highly reliable Houston official leaked to me, "And certainly he would keep any of his sources from talking to the press at this time."

A check at the Justice Department revealed that while unnamed Justice Department officials were going ahead with pursuing the charges made against the Vice President, they had no knowledge of the Vice President's future political plans. A highly placed source close to an unidentified Attorney General who formerly was Secretary of HEW and Defense denied that any leaks about the resignation came from the Justice Department. "We are not the only people in Washington who have unnamed sources."

To make things more confusing, The Washington Post referred to their unnamed source as a "Republican Party leader." Since the Republican Party has no leaders, the feeling among a number of unnamed newspapermen here is that this was a smokescreen to protect The Post's real source who probably insisted that his identity be disguised.

Whatever the truth of the matter, there is general agreement here that there are many unnamed sources in Washington who are out to get the Vice President.

At one time the V.P. thought they were all in the press. But lately he's realized most of the unnamed sources are members of his own political party. He also has reason to believe that the administration is either encouraging the unnamed sources to speak out or at least doing nothing to keep these sources quiet.

Proof of this is that every time someone asks an anonymous White House spokesman where an unnamed President of the United States stands on the Vice President, the spokesman says, not for attribution, "No comment."