

Wecht Raises Specific Questions in 'Political

In light of the *Post-Gazette's* frequent attacks and petty criticisms of various Democratic governmental officials, and obvious efforts to defend and champion local Republican candidates, I was not the least bit surprised by your editorial of Feb. 9, in which you attempted to portray me as the villain of the recent expose involving Robert Peirce.

"Stonewalling" is a creation of another infamous Republican, Richard Nixon, and would appear to be a favorite *modus operandi* of political scoundrels in times of stress. If you're in trouble because of official malfeasance, and your political boat is sinking, then find a convenient enemy, lash out with false charges, create a smoke-screen, obfuscate the issues and hope that the news media and electorate will become sufficiently confused to lose sight of the central issues and individuals involved in the scandal.

And a *political scandal* of major proportions — no matter how hard you attempt to cover up and ignore this characterization — is exactly what we are dealing with regarding the Peirce/Curry affair.

Some statements to prove my contentions:

► Mr. Peirce claims that shortly after he was photographed at the Quality Court Motel on March 16, 1973, he "reported" the incident to John Portella, an active FBI agent. And yet, the U.S. Attorney, Blair Griffith, has stated that his office did not become "officially" aware of this matter until the summer of 1976, more than three years later. (As reported in *The Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 9 and Feb. 12, 1978.)

► If Mr. Peirce reported this incident to Mr. Portella, an active FBI agent at the time, could Mr. Portella, in turn, fail to report such a case to his superiors? Or if Mr. Portella did make such a report to his superiors, could they, in turn, fail to report such a case to the U.S. attorney?

► Is it purely fortuitous that David Portella, son of the FBI agent to whom Mr. Peirce claims to have reported his motel incident, was given a job by Peirce, the clerk of courts, in that office in 1974? (See Allegheny County Employment Records.)

► In what capacity, for what purpose and exactly when and how did Robert Butzler, then chief of police for Ross Township, become involved in this matter in assisting Portella to obtain the pictures that had been taken of Peirce and Michael Curry at the motel? (As reported in the *Post-Gazette*, Sept. 23, 1976.)

► When, how and for what reason did Elsie Hillman, the most prominent and powerful Republican in Allegheny County, become involved in this matter? (As reported in the *Post-Gazette*, Sept. 23, 1976.)

► Were the pictures ultimately obtained by Portella and Butzler and turned over to Mrs. Hillman? Did any money exchange hands, or were any promises of a political nature made or implied for the

transfer of the photographs?

► If the photographs were obtained and destroyed, was this not a destruction of evidence in a case of attempted extortion and blackmail; and if the pictures were deliberately destroyed, was this not an obstruction of justice by someone who certainly must have known that attempts had been made to extort Mrs. Curry and blackmail Mr. Peirce?

► Mr. Peirce states that he was not in any way politically compromised or blackmailed by these photographs, allegedly taken by an agent of a major bondsman in Allegheny County. (As reported in the *Press*, Sept. 26, 1976.)

► Why then were there no forfeitures of bonds by Peirce as clerk of courts from the summer of 1973 until 1975?

► Did various Republican officials and other Republican Party leaders in Allegheny County agree to slate Mr. Peirce to run for district attorney in 1975, an office one would covet for obvious reasons? Why then did Peirce suddenly decide to abandon that spot and run for commissioner instead; and did he not swear to his running mate, Dr. William Hunt, the incumbent Republican commissioner, that "There was absolutely no truth whatsoever" to the rumors along Grant Street that he had been photographed at a motel with a former client, who was awaiting trial on a drug charge and whose bond was being handled by Peirce's office?

► When the FBI and the U.S.

attorney began their official investigation into the bail-bond scandal and the Peirce matter in 1976, it was discovered by Wayne Kelly, Peirce's successor in the clerk of courts office, that Michael Curry's file was missing. Mr. Kelly found the file in a hidden recess of a particular employee's desk and immediately fired that man. Is it of any interest to the *Post-Gazette* to note that this individual was hired shortly thereafter by Commissioner Peirce and still works for the county at a better salary than he earned in the clerk of courts office? (See Allegheny County Employment Records.)

► After Mr. Peirce was called to testify before the federal grand jury in September, 1976, he told the news media that they had simply asked him questions about "procedures in the clerk of courts office." (As reported in the *Press*, Sept. 24, 1976.) Now after the indictments were returned against Edward Reddington and David Wander, Peirce states that he had testified twice before the grand jury concerning the blackmail plot. (As reported in the *Post-Gazette*, Sept. 8, 1977.)

Which statement was the truth?

► Richard Thornburgh was U.S. attorney at the time this incident occurred (March 16, 1973), and did not resign to go to Washington, D.C., until July 6, 1975. Mr. Griffith became U.S. attorney on July 7, 1975. Did either of these two Republican officials ever hear about the Peirce affair prior to the summer of 1976, the time when

Scandal of Major Proportions'

Mr. Griffith tells us he first became "officially" aware of the investigation? If so, why did neither of them institute a formal inquiry into the matter sooner? Was the reason that certain Republican Party officials knew they were going to lose the general election and preferred to sacrifice Bill Hunt, knowing that any public disclosure of an official investigation into the matter would lead to the defeat of Bob Peirce?

Approximately one and a half years elapsed from the time of Mr. Griffith's official awareness until the indictments were obtained. (As reported in the *Press*, Feb. 12, 1978.) Why did it take so long for such a simple case? If Mr. Peirce was cooperating with law enforcement officials, he was aware of all the principals involved, i.e., Michael Curry and David Wander. Was it pure coincidence that Mr. Griffith finally made a move shortly after his conference with Attorney General Griffin Bell in Washington at which time the news media were informed that they had discussed "politically sensitive" cases currently being handled by the local U.S. attorney's office?

There are many more facts that could be cited and many more fascinating queries that could be posed, but I believe that the items I have set forth amply prove my charge that the Peirce/Curry affair is not simply a matter of private sexual indiscretion, but rather, the nidus of a substantial political scandal. The fact that the *Post-*

Gazette has not deemed it appropriate to pursue this investigation clearly demonstrates your newspaper's political bias.

The *Post-Gazette* has highlighted every suspicion, innuendo, allegation, indictment and conviction involving Democratic officials without hesitation, and often with a notable lack of decency and fair play. Your newspaper has given us the Marston affair in "serialized" form, like a daily comic strip. You seem to rediscover anew the so-called Manpower scandal practically every day, and your paper attempted to smear Commissioner Tom Foerster quite often with baseless, unproven innuendoes during last year's mayoralty campaign regarding the Manpower situation.

The only thing the *Post-Gazette* can find on which to write an editorial involving the Peirce affair is my letter which was a pri-

vate communication to Mr. Peirce, and which he decided personally to release to your reporter. The *Post-Gazette* solely, of all the various newspaper, radio and television media, chose to publish or comment upon this. Absolutely incredible!

CYRIL H. WECHT
Pittsburgh

Insurance Firm Paying Wecht's Settlement Fee

Coroner Cyril H. Wecht yesterday said the \$5,000 he agreed to pay a former assistant district attorney to settle a libel suit will be paid by an insurance carrier.

Wecht, currently running for county Democratic Party chairman, said the settlement was reached to avoid a three-week trial and would barely pay expenses for Mark F. Geary, a former assistant district attorney who charged Wecht lobbied for his firing.

Geary filed suit charging libel, which was ultimately dismissed, and interference with his job.

Geary, a Republican, served as an assistant from 1970 until he was fired in 1975 after Wecht complained he kept members of his coroner's staff waiting to testify for the prosecution.

Geary was fired by former Democratic District Attorney John J. Hickton.

The settlement amount, which was to be undisclosed, will be paid by St. Paul Insurance Co., according to Wecht.

He criticized the *Post-Gazette* for not reporting the insurance coverage. Initially, however, Wecht declined to comment on the settlement story.

