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# Pete Hamill

## THE SPIRO FUND

About an hour ago, I sat down and wrote a check for \$10 and sent it to the Spiro T. Agnew Defense Fund, at the Executive Office Building in Washington. It seemed to be the very least that a newspaperman could do for poor Agnew. And if you are a New Yorker, or a child of immigrants, helping to defend Agnew almost becomes a duty.

To begin with, Agnew must now realize what most New Yorkers have known for a long time: that Richard Nixon just might be the cruelest, most loathsome President of this century, in terms of the way he treats his friends. If a guy from Bay Ridge treated his friends the way Nixon has treated Agnew, John Mitchell, or L. Patrick Gray, they would pick his remains out of an ashtray some Saturday night.

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But Nixon is the President, unreachable by common human emotions or basic loyalties. Nixon is for Nixon, and the rest of us can wither or die, whether we're blacks trying to get jobs, Cambodians trying to plow a field, or New Yorkers trying to rebuild their city. If Nixon can enlarge upon, or even simply maintain his hold upon his monarchical throne, he would gladly see all of us twist slowly in the wind.

I don't know what Agnew did or did not do in Maryland; that will come from the grand jury. But there is something inherently disgusting about the obvious White House joy in revealing that Agnew is now in the process of plea bargaining, like a common felon in Criminal Court. The official White House liars deny that the stories are

coming from the White House, of course, but with Nixon's polluted crew a denial is tantamount to confirmation.

So Agnew, who sullied his own personal reputation in the service of Nixon, now has to go to see Nixon and ask that Attorney General Richardson drop criminal charges in exchange for Agnew's resignation. It's humiliating, but Agnew must now know that Nixon and his employers don't really care about Americans like Agnew. Agnew is an ethnic, a child of immigrants, and Nixon's people have nothing but patronizing contempt for the ethnics and the immigrants.

The bargaining process is going on longer than seems necessary, but that is probably because Agnew fully understands the treacherous nature of the men he's dealing with. Nixon is perfectly capable of telling Agnew that the charges will be dropped, or greatly reduced, in exchange for resignation; and then double-crossing him. So that Agnew could resign and go to jail for the rest of his life. Look at what happened to G. Gordon Liddy, Howard Hunt, Bernard Barker and the others. They'll still be in the slam when Nixon is retired to the \$10 million rip-off called San Clemente.

And so, Agnew, like most children of immigrants, has traveled the downward path to wisdom. Nixon used him in 1969 and 1970, letting Agnew carry the war against the press as part of a complicated strategy of White House survival. Through Agnew, Nixon passed on a giant lie: that the press was Democrat-

ic, when it is in fact overwhelmingly Republican: that the press was disloyal, when it was, in fact, Nixon's crowd that engaged in widespread subversion of American principles.

This is not to say that Agnew did not believe what he was saying at the time. Nixon certainly recognized the insecurity of the ethnic, the need for the immigrant's child to feel that elitist conspiracies were blocking full entry into the larger society. Agnew bought the success ethic that marked so many people in the Nixon mob; the need to succeed often appeared to have overwhelmed the common decency of the man himself. Nixon is made of the same cloth; so he turned Agnew into his valet for as long as he needed him and then sent him back to the stable.

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Now Nixon is using poor Agnew even more viciously: he must be gambling that the nation cannot sustain a double shock, the loss of a Vice President and the President in a single year. Let Agnew be axed, and Nixon will somehow drift through the next three years, re-writing history as he goes. At the same time, he can choose the next Vice President—someone like John Connally—who would insure the continuity of the Permanent Government in this country: all those owners of airlines, big businesses, multinational corporations, oil, gas and defense companies, who don't care who is in power as long as they own him.

It's a disgusting mess, but I hope Agnew fights. I hope he stays in office, and I hope he remembers where all the bodies are buried, and I hope he makes Nixon squirm and choke and shake across the next few months. Agnew used to pull a lot of tough stuff with his mouth. But real toughness comes with action, and now he has a chance to prove himself at last. I hope he goes down throwing punches.