

Agnew Denies Guilt, Hits

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

Former Vice President Spiro Theodore Agnew bowed out last night, still asserting his innocence and blaming "scurrilous leaks" of the charges against him for his resignation.

Agnew said that his admission of federal income tax underpayment, which coincided with his resignation last week, was "not an admission of guilt but a plea of no contest, done to quell the raging storm."

In what he said was his farewell address to the American public, Agnew lauded President Nixon and Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford and again criticized his accusers, the prosecutors and the news media for spreading "misconceptions" about him.

But Agnew conceded that he had been damaged by the accusations of bribery, tax fraud, conspiracy and ex-

tortion beyond any ability to serve effectively as Vice President.

"The American people deserve to have a Vice President who commands their unimpaired confidence and implicit trust," Agnew said in a nationally televised address. "For more than two months now, you have not had such a Vice President."

Agnew said that "up until a few days ago" he had been determined to "fight for my integrity and my office, whatever the costs."

However, he said he had decided "after hard deliberation and much prayer" that the public interest would be served by his resignation. This was so, Agnew continued, because remaining in office and fighting the accusations against him would have subjected the country to an "agonizing period of months without an unclouded successor for the presidency."

On Sept. 29 in Los Angeles the Vice

President had told a cheering crowd of Republican women that he intended to remain in office even if indicted. Agnew alluded to this statement last night, calling it a "tormented verbal assertion."

There were many other references in Agnew's 20-minute speech to his personal ordeal of the past two months. At one point he spoke of his "personal sorrow;" at another he called his experience "a nightmare come true."

Only once, however, did Agnew refer to his own conduct with any regret.

That was when he said that the criminal charges against him came down to "the accusation that I permitted my fund-raising activities and my contract dispensing activities to overlap in an unethical and immoral manner."

"Perhaps, judged by the new, post-

OCTOBER 16, 1973

Phone 223-6000

Classified 223-6200
Circulation 223-6100

15c Beyond Washington,
Maryland and Virginia

10c

'Scurrilous Leaks'

Watergate morality, I did," Agnew continued, "but the prosecution's assertion that I was the initiator and gray eminence in an unprecedented and complex scheme of extortion is not realistic."

Agnew then launched into an attack on the system of government in Maryland, which he said exists at every government level in the nation, under which elected officials must make decisions on contracts sought by firms that have made campaign contributions.

"In the forefront of those eager to contribute always have been the contractors, seeking non-bid state contracts," Agnew said.

"Portraying the prosecution's witnesses, who have long been experienced and aggressive in Maryland politics, as innocent victims of illegal enticements from me is enough to provoke incredulous laughter from any

experienced political observer," Agnew said.

The former Vice President then reserved his harshest language for those who had provided information against him.

"They know where the questionable propositions originate," Agnew said. "They know how many shoddy schemes a political man must reject in the course of carrying out his office. What is it that makes my accusers—self-confessed bribe-brokers, extortionists and conspirators—believable? And I point out that their stories have been treated as gospel by most of the media.

Agnew warmly praised President Nixon for treating him with "restraint and compassion" and for doing "his best to accommodate human decency without sacrificing legal rectitude." In a near-apology he expressed "deep re-

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SPIRO T. AGNEW

... resigned "in the public interest"

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gret" to the President for any diversion his own case may have caused from the "country's pursuit of the great goals of peace, prosperity and progress, which the Nixon administration last year was overwhelmingly rejected to pursue."

But at one point the former Vice President implicitly conceded that the damage already done to the Nixon administration by the Watergate case had weighed in his resignation consideration.

"To put his country through the ordeal of division and uncertainty would be a selfish and unpatriotic action for any man at the best of times," Agnew said. "At this especially critical time,

son as part of the agreement between the Justice Department and Agnew's lawyers. Soon after taking office as governor of Maryland, the exposition said, Agnew advised Baltimore banker and real estate developer I.H. Hammerman "that it was customary for engineers to make substantial cash payments in return for engineering contracts with the state of Maryland."

According to this evidence, Hammerman discussed the matter with Jerome B. Wolff, then the new chairman-director of the Maryland Roads Commission. Subsequently, the three agreed to split cash payments on a basis that gave 50 per cent to Agnew and 25 per cent to each of the other two men.

These payoffs continued, three or four times a year, up to December, 1972, the document said.

with a dangerous war raging in the Middle East, and with the nation still torn by the wrenching experiences of the past year, it would have been intolerable."

Agnew worked on the speech in seclusion over the weekend, apparently without any help from vice presidential speechwriters. The former Vice President showed up yesterday in his old office in the Executive Office Building, where he has been working on weekdays since his resignation.

"The speech is largely a personal effort," said J. Marsh Thomson, who emphasized that he was no longer speaking in the official capacity of Agnew's press secretary. Thomson and other aides are expected to leave the vice presidential staff with the next week or two.

Hammerman and Agnew developed a close friendship when the latter was Baltimore county executive between 1963 and 1966, the evidence alleged. They often discussed Agnew's financial situation.

"Mr. Agnew complained about, and told Hammerman that he had not accumulated any wealth before he assumed public office, had no inheritance, and as a public official received what he considered a small salary," the document said.

"Mr. Agnew believed, moreover, that his public position required him to adopt a standard of living beyond his means and that his political ambitions required him to build a financially strong political organization."

Agnew's affairs since his resignation have been conducted by Brig. Gen. John M. Dunn, his military aide.

Dunn made the arrangements for Agnew's television speech, which was broadcast live from NBC studios in Washington. NBC donated the time for what the network called "a special news event" and pooled the speech for other television networks.

U.S. attorneys who gathered evidence in the Agnew case said last week that Agnew asked for and collected more than \$100,000 in cash payments while he was Baltimore county executive, Governor of Maryland and U.S. Vice President.

The charges were contained in a 40-page "exposition of evidence" entered by Attorney General Elliot L. Richard-

Meanwhile, in a Los Angeles speech, Democratic National Chairman Robert S. Strauss said that the resignation of Agnew, coming atop the Watergate case, should deprive the Republicans of the "law and order" issue in next year's congressional elections.

"There never was a more lawless band than there was in the White House," Strauss said in an interview with the Associated Press.

He also objected to the depicting of Agnew as a "brave, heroic, self-sacrificing man who resigned in the nation's interests."

"He didn't serve the nation," Strauss said. "He held the welfare of this nation in one hand and bargained for his freedom. I find nothing heroic, nothing brave and nothing to serve the nation in that."