

McGovern Charges Massive Corruption

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By Lou Cannon

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Sen. George McGovern yesterday accused the Nixon administration of being "the most corrupt in history" and charged that the President "has no constant principle except opportunism and manipulation."

In a speech to United Press International editors and publishers meeting here, the Democratic presidential nominee challenged the press to force a public debate of the issues. McGovern said the Nixon administration was trying to bully the press and turn it into a cheering section for the President's re-election campaign.

Vice President Spiro Agnew, replying in the same forum five hours later, accused McGovern of "reckless" charges that Agnew

said showed a lack of maturity and self-discipline.

"Burning ambition coupled with the prospect of defeat supersedes rationality," Agnew said to laughter and some applause.

The Vice President went on to say that all suggestions of wrongdoing had been thoroughly investigated by the administration, by a Democratic-controlled Congress and by the press without turning up evidence of corruption. Agnew said that "no amount of verbal pyrotechnics by a desperate opposition" would prevent an overwhelming re-election of the President.

In an echo of the 1952 campaign when Republicans campaigned on the theme of "the mess in Washington,"

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McGovern said that "the Nixon mess in Washington includes the corruption of our ideals in an unjust war as well as the corruption of the Justice Department in the ITT case."

dals during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, McGovern said:

"But at no time have we witnessed official corruption as wide or as deep as the mess in Washington right now."

McGovern's litany of purported corruption included the war, the administration's Supreme Court appointments, the Watergate burglary of Democratic headquarters and "a wheat deal that freezes farmers out of their earnings as surely as any frost, while a few grain companies reap fantastic profits."

But the major thrust of his speech was devoted to what the South Dakota senator saw as an attempt both to coerce the press and to curry its favor.

"A Cheering Section"

"This administration has tried to bully the press into docile submission," McGovern said. "It has launched a deliberate, sustained campaign to discredit newspapers and broadcasters . . . This administration seeks to replace a press corps with a cheering section — with a propaganda machine that is in league with the government, to be used by the government, to tell the people what the government wants to hear."

McGovern called upon reporters to inform the coun-

try that Mr. Nixon was "hiding" from the public debate, that he was "telling lies to a handpicked crowd" and that he would not hold press conferences or answer questions.

Agnew, when asked about McGovern's charges, responded that the administration had through his own campaigning and the campaigning of presidential surrogates opened itself "to as much free-swinging media activity as has ever been done by an administration in a presidential campaign."

The President has proper reasons for limiting his personal campaigning and "awe-inspiring responsibilities that chain him to the White House." Anything that the President says at a press conference and that is partially reported, Agnew contended, could lead to misunderstandings abroad.

" . . . How can you expect a man to be President and a candidate at the same time?" Agnew asked.

Agnew also responded to an editor's question about a Washington Post story linking former Attorney General John Mitchell to a "secret fund" established for political espionage purposes. The Vice President referred to the story as an "add-on Watergate" that was based on anonymous sources.

"It seems to me that once we come to publication point where we say that a man has actually been engaged in criminal conduct, he is entitled to be faced by his accuser on the evidence against him," Agnew said. ". . . I don't find the kind of thing the Washington Post

published meets the test of credibility in my mind. If they have something, let them spit it out."

Faring Better Now

The Vice President said on two occasions that he did not believe there was either a "new Agnew" or a "new press" but that he was faring better in the present campaign than in 1968 because he was no longer "the unknown quantity, the new boy in school."

In response to another question about whether his past criticisms of the press had inhibited television reporting, the Vice President said he saw no evidence of it and added:

"I have a right under the First Amendment to criticize unfairness just as those in the media do."

The Vice President answered questions for 45 minutes, while McGovern responded to queries for five minutes before resuming his campaign schedule. Agnew attended a fund-raising reception honoring Nixon reelection chairman Clark MacGregor last night and will return to the campaign trail today.

One of the questions put to Agnew brought a candid admission from him that the Nixon administration favored the re-election of Democratic Sen. James Eastland of Mississippi, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"The Nixon administration will not actively oppose a senator who on principle has stood four-square with many important administration programs, many vital votes, many changes that we

felt were desperately needed by this country at a time when he is up for reelection in his home state," Agnew said.

Eastland's opponent, Gil Carmichael, was kept off the platform when Agnew spoke in Jackson, Miss., on Friday.

Eagleton Issue

In his speech to the editors, McGovern raised anew the issue of his dumping of Sen. Thomas Eagleton of Missouri as his running mate.

"I make no apology for changing my mind in light of additional insight and reflection," McGovern said. "Indeed, a leader who is afraid to change his mind for fear of losing face is no leader at all. He is a disaster — as witness our experience in Vietnam."

McGovern referred to "recent news surveys" which conclude that his handling of the Eagleton crisis and his changes on tax and welfare issues "suggest uncertainty and undermine my credibility in comparison with a more reliable and competent record by Mr. Nixon."

If that is so, McGovern said, "it represents one of three failures or perhaps all three: a failure by me to communicate my real character and veracity to the voters; secondly, a masterful political selling job by Mr. Nixon, or third, a possible inability by some of the press to bring the same critical examination to the two candidates."