

Mr. Agnew's Dilemma Post 6/9/73

Next to Mr. Nixon himself, Vice President Spiro Agnew these days is getting more free—and conflicting—advice about his Watergate posture than any other figure in Washington. There are those who think Mr. Agnew ought to be 1,000 per cent loyal to the President; there are others who think he ought to clearly dissociate himself, and, finally, there is a third group who feel the best course for the Vice President would be for him to have his loyalty and eat it, too, so to speak.

The ultraconservative Human Events, for instance, says it would not suggest that the Vice President act in any manner that would undermine the President's capacity to retrieve himself," but, it adds; "Many pro-Agnew Republicans are seriously concerned about the way the Vice President addresses himself to the Watergate matter. Under no circumstances, they point out, should he resemble a professional apologist for the President's actions in this disaster, and they worry that that is what he is in danger of becoming."

Loyalty, Human Events asserts, "should not mean parroting the White House line on Watergate. Moreover, the Vice President must consider loyalty to the country and to the party as well as to the President." Mr. Agnew seems to have got the point. His most recent Watergate statements, while still supportive of Mr. Nixon, have chiefly been testimonials to the innocence and integrity of the Republican Party.

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eral from the whole Watergate scandal. "It's a good time to be a Republican," he told a party rally. "I'm just as proud of my party tonight as I was on the day I first registered."

That is a smooth shift away from the particular to the general. Watergate, Mr. Agnew says, is "not representative" of the Republican Party. He also says that while he would "not attempt to assert that certain individuals are without fault . . . I do state that the Republican Party is not involved, not indicted, not responsible."

That's quite a change from the indignant statements Mr. Agnew used to is-

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sue in blanket defense of the administration's role in the Watergate case. Today, the Vice President seems to be conceding there may have been some wrongdoing but, if so, the Republican Party can't be blamed nor, by extension, Mr. Agnew, either.

This is not disloyal, for the Vice President continues to say that he has faith in Mr. Nixon. All the same, Mr. Agnew's political backers feel he has succeeded in establishing a subtle personal disassociation, which, if Mr. Nixon goes down, could save the Veep from going down with him.

The possibility of Mr. Agnew becoming President through the resignation or impeachment of Mr. Nixon is no longer as remote as it once seemed. And if that should happen, Human Events remarks, "it is crucial that the Vice President assume the presidency clear of the Watergate debris."

Considering how contemptuously he has been treated by the White House clique, Mr. Agnew has small cause to be excessively loyal to Mr. Nixon. Further, even if the President manages to finish his term, he will have little or no say in choosing his party's next nominee. As Victor Gold, the former press secretary to Mr. Agnew, has said, "A setting sun giveth forth little heat."

Among independent Republicans, as well as Democrats like Clark Clifford, there is talk of a whole new deal, based on the resignation of both Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew. The first step would be the Vice President's retirement, after which Mr. Nixon, with the advice and consent of Congress, would name a new Veep.

The last step would be the resignation of Mr. Nixon, upon which the new Vice President would take over the White House.

The idea would be to install a kind of "national" government in order to hold the nation together until the next election. It has at least one fatal fault: As every friend of Agnew's knows, the Vice President could never be pressured into quitting, even if Mr. Nixon were to yield. The Agnewian view is that the meek may inherit the earth but not the presidency.