

Caterer Tied to Firm Probed By FTC Aided Agnew Gala

6/21/73
By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

A Baltimore firm catered a free party for Vice President Spiro T. Agnew as a donation to the Salute for Ted Agnew Night committee last year at a time when the caterer's parent conglomerate was under two investigations by the Federal Trade Commission.

The Salute committee's failure to report the gift of the party, which was held after the Salute gala, was cited in one of four indictments formally served Tuesday on Blagden H. Wharton, vice president of the Maryland National Bank and treasurer of the Salute for Ted Agnew fund-raiser held May 19, 1972.

Louis Bluefeld, executive vice president of Bluefeld Caterers, said the Vice President asked him to cater the

party for entertainers who performed at the fund-raising event. Bluefeld said, however, that it was his own decision not to charge for catering the party, which was attended by Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra and many other guests.

A spokesman for the Vice President said yesterday that the decision to hold the party was made by the Vice President's staff, but that the choice of Bluefeld's firm was made by the Salute committee.

The party was held at a time when Bluefeld's parent company, ARA Services, Inc., a fast food and paperback publishing conglomerate, was under two investigations by the Federal Trade Commission for unfair merger and acquisition practices. ARA subsequently was challenged for these practices by the FTC and ordered to divest itself of some of its companies in both cases.

Bluefeld, whose firm has catered political affairs for both Democrats and Republicans for years in the Baltimore area, said it was the first time he had ever canceled a charge for such a party. "It leads to problems," he said, "but I have a very, very warm spot in my heart for the Vice President."

Bluefeld said that when the bill for the catering reached his desk several days after the party, he wrote "No Charge" across it.

Bluefeld could not recall where the canceled bill was

sent. Lynn Meyerhoff, who was in charge of the Agnew night committee, said yesterday that a number of the bills received by the committee at that time were forwarded directly to the Vice President's office and handled by his staff.

Bluefeld estimated that the cost of the hors d'oeuvres, fruit and cocktail mix used at the party came to about \$385. He said about 100 persons attended and that the committee had provided its own liquor.

This was disputed, however, by Robert M. Pomory, executive director of the Lyric Theater where both the fund-raising event and the party were held. Pomory said the caterer had supplied the liquor and the party was attended by 150 to 200 persons.

"I'm absolutely positive of this," Pomory said, "because I sat in on the negotiations and saw them bringing in the food and liquor."

Other caterers in the Baltimore area said a party like the one described by Pomory would ordinarily cost between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

In its federal and state campaign reports, the Agnew night committee listed no gift from Bluefeld or payment to the catering firm for the party.

A spokesman for ARA Services, Inc., at the conglomerate's home office in Philadelphia said officials there were aware of the Agnew night fund raiser but did not know Bluefeld had canceled the charge for the party.