

THE VICE PRESIDENCY

Meet the New Agnew

As the Watergate storm swirls around him without appearing to damage him, Vice President Spiro Agnew has become a potentially more important figure than at any time since he took office. Talking with TIME Washington Correspondent Hays Gorey last week, he expressed his "total confidence" that the President was not involved in Watergate, and indicated that he could only imagine himself becoming President in 1977, if he decided to run and was elected.

Still, he was careful to put some distance, however modest, between the President and himself. He suggested that setting up the Committee for the Re-Election of the President was a mistake. He thought that the President should submit to some kind of press interview on Watergate. He strongly opposed wiretapping, except under court order in cases involving national security or organized crime. While defending Nixon's foreign policy, he made it clear that his own domestic policy would be different.

In the course of the conversation, Agnew did not resort to any of his old gibes against rad-libbers or anybody else—suggesting that a certain mellowing has occurred in the nation's second highest political office. A somewhat new Agnew seemed to be emerging as he presented his views on current problems and future prospects:

The President's role in Watergate. I would assume that if he's human and fallible like the rest of us, he's made some mistakes. But I think they have been very minimal. It's pretty hard for me to make an analysis of what could have been done to prevent the unfortunate Watergate situation. Some people say he should not have set up the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. In hindsight, you can make a good argument for that.

Watergate does show one thing. In a job as big as the presidency, you can't watch everything. You're at the mercy of people carrying out your instructions. I don't think there's any foolproof way in which a person who heads a large enterprise can protect himself against people who work for him. You want people with initiative. You don't want people who check with you before doing anything, because that's of no value to you. When you stimulate initiative, you bring about the situation where sometimes people make a misjudgment based on their analysis and not on yours. There isn't any other way. We're all locked into the people we work for.

The President's statements on Watergate. I think he has said everything he can possibly say as of this moment. Given the fact that these matters are pending in the courts, and the fact that when the President speaks he is

heard worldwide, any kind of speculation on his part could be highly prejudicial. You remember the criticism that burst around him when he made the statement about Charles Manson?* There's a similar situation here.

Obviously it is important to get the President before the people. I think a freewheeling press conference would be a mistake. I don't think the President can be put in a position where there's an inquisition with people screaming and yelling the way they've been known to do. Out of that volatile atmosphere comes an impression that's highly misleading sometimes. If you could get some of the giants of your profession, a couple of people from the electronic media, a couple of people from the print media, to represent the profession, you could figure out a proper kind of interview. You could screen out the matters that are highly improper under the circumstances and concentrate strictly on information concerning the President's position.

Campaign financing. I've given a lot of thought to this, and I wish I could sit here and tell you I have the answers. But I don't, because in the final analysis, no matter how good your reforms are and how ideal the method of financing campaigns, there will always be those who break the law. The only reason I feel optimistic that some kind of financing within the public area could help is that the law of diminishing returns applies to money put into political campaigns. If a candidate has enough money to take care of his immediate requirements—getting his name before the public, taking care of his travel and headquarters—then another candidate may spend twice as much but he won't get twice as much back for it. I'm leaning toward the idea of making sure that every serious candidate has enough money to run a decent, respectable campaign without raising funds through private sources.

Bugging. The entire idea of bugging I find personally repulsive. I understand that wiretapping under court surveillance for specified matters of national security and against organized crime is a tactic that has led to some very good results, which could not have been obtained otherwise. But surreptitious wiretapping for political reasons is offensive to me. I would never sanction listening in on somebody else's personal conversations.

The role of the Vice President. I don't really see that a Vice President can be given a direct line assignment. Suppose the President handed me an assignment in a field that conflicted with a Cabinet officer's direct responsibility? That would be automatic trouble be-

*During the 1970 trial of Manson for cult murders in California, Nixon remarked that the press was glamorizing a man who was "guilty, directly or indirectly, of eight murders without reason." After widespread criticism in the press, Nixon issued a retraction: he had not intended to prejudice Manson's guilt.



DAVID HUME KENNERLY

AGNEW MAKING A POINT
A certain mellowing.

cause I'd be stepping on his toes. So usually what the Vice President is given to do cuts across Cabinet lines, like dealing with revenue sharing. I think President Nixon views the Vice President as a spokesman for Administration policy. He is not dealing with conflicting interests within the Government. He is dealing more with expressing established policy to opinion leaders throughout the country.

The policies he would pursue if he became President. I think the President's foreign policy judgments have been really superior. They have diminished tension in the world. We really do see the world quieting down. If I could continue the President's foreign policy, I would consider that a very good course. I would probably have some different things I would like to try in the domestic field. That doesn't mean my ideas are superior to those of the President. It simply means that everyone who has had fairly broad experience has his own notions of what would be successful. Domestic policy, as opposed to foreign policy, requires a great many more frequent fine tunings and adjustments.

Press relations. I've tried to be more forthcoming with reporters in interviews and let them see a little more of what my thought processes are. I've also tried to be a little more trusting about how they're going to handle the story and not look at each question as some way to get at me. I have to say that since we've been talking more freely, I think my interviews have been a better reflection of what I think than when I had to worry about each construction of every phrase I said. I've learned that if you get 60% of what you're trying to put across, that's all right.