

Agnew's Press Secretary a Touchy Zealot

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LOS ANGELES, Nov. 2— With all proper credit to Joseph Conrad and Lord Jim, Victor Gold has studiously concluded that a man discovers who he is by what he does.

If that is the case, then the 44-year-old press secretary to Vice President Agnew must surely have come to know himself this year as a tense, touchy fellow given to tirades, temper tantrums, and an occasional impersonation of Genghis Khan with a toothache.

In six weeks of travel, from New England here to the West Coast, he has by rough count shouted insults at 11 bus drivers and one pilot, berated 44 cameramen and reporters, thrown things at his assistant once, excoriated his secretary twice, and managed to offend an assorted gathering of Secret Service agents, local policemen and potential Republican voters.

Feeding of the Press

Meanwhile, he has nevertheless gone about the care and feeding of the press with a zeal and an expertise that have won him endorsements from some journalists as the best in his business.

He sees himself as "basically a verbalizer"; his wife, Dale, calls him a "perfectionist"; his three children think of him as "a good guy," and a reporter who has known him for years describes him as "standing forever just on the brink of mental health."

But for those who have followed Mr. Agnew's low-keyed campaign this year, Mr. Gold has become its one colorful component, an oasis of flamboyant unpredictability on a desert of prosaic politics, the usually well-dressed man who flew one leg of a trip wearing a University of Alabama football jersey and a coach's baseball cap.

He is a native of Louisiana who did his undergraduate work at Tulane University, went to law school at the University of Alabama, earned a degree, married a girl from Birmingham, opened a practice there and began to dabble in liberal Democratic politics.

'A Visceral Conservative'

"Then one day, I realized I was wrong," he said recently. "Or maybe what I mean is that I saw that the leadership of the Democratic party was wrong — so I switched. Now, I'm a visceral conservative."

By that he says he means that he reacts from somewhere in his stomach and there have been few elements of the so-called "liberal establishment" that have escaped his abdominal acids.

Yet his finest rages have been reserved for those mo-



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Victor Gold, Vice President Agnew's press secretary, talking to reporters at National Airport, Washington, before the group took off for a campaign swing Monday.

ments when the Vice President ducks into his limousine and the long cavalcade of automobiles and press buses begins to roll toward its destination.

"Move! Move! Move!" he screams from a standing crouch just behind the hapless bus driver. "Move, damn it, I said move!"

If the driver's speed and courage satisfy him, there is often the motorcade-interloper to bring him anguish. In Tampa, Fla., last month, for instance, a local television station's mobile van pulled into the string of official vehicles and Mr. Gold immediately erupted.

"Get the hell out of the motorcade or we'll get the cops on you," he screamed at the astonished occupants of the little truck as he leaned out the open door of the careering press bus.

Not Interested in Voters

"Be careful, Vic," someone shouted from the back. "They might be voters."

"I'm interested in motorcades, not voters," came the pained response from Mr. Gold.

Nevertheless, he does have a variety of other interests, including Shakespeare, good wines, football and trivia.

These days however his greatest interest is the prospect of having Mr. Agnew re-elected. "That's his strongest suit, his loyalty," a col-

a reporter and abruptly end a news conference with the traditional benediction, "Thank you, Mr. Vice President," when the questions veer from what he considers to be an appropriate path.

Mr. Gold came to work for the Vice President more than three years ago after leaving Birmingham for a public relations job in Washington and serving as deputy press secretary on the Presidential campaign of Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964.

'He Was Straight'

"He was straight, on the level, always honest," recalls one of the reporters who covered that campaign and who helped to buy Mr. Gold a gold typewriter when it was ended.

But despite his broad reputation among the press as a "square shooter," Mr. Gold, as almost everyone in politics does, has another side. He has, for instance, kept two reporters from traveling with the Vice President this year on the pretense that the press plane is completely full.

One of the journalists banned is writing a book on the press and the campaign and has also written for Rolling Stone. The other reporter works for The Village Voice. Neither paper is among Mr. Gold's favorites. The manifests of the press plane show that there have been seats available on every flight.

"It think about the best thing to say about Victor Gold," says one of the reporters who has known him well for a long time, "is that he is Spiro Agnew's Spiro Agnew."