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# They'll Sink or Swim Together

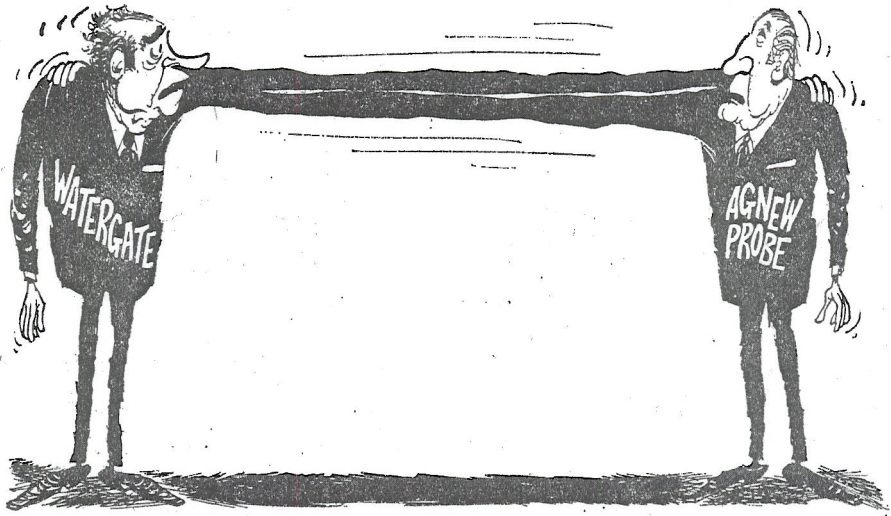
Spiro Agnew's troubles impart a double-or-nothing character to the outcome of Watergate. For if the Vice President survives, he will provide almost iron-clad insurance against pressures to force President Nixon from office.

But if Mr. Agnew is found seriously culpable, Mr. Nixon's troubles will be greatly intensified. There will be set in motion a procedure apt to end in the ouster of both men.

To grasp the situation, it is first necessary to get a feel for the pace of the inquiry into the allegations against the Vice President. Contrary to widespread impression, the investigation into Mr. Agnew's case is still at an early stage. Witnesses have not yet been sworn and records have not yet been fully examined. Something like a month will probably have to go by before there is a determination one way or another on the case of the Vice President.

Already, however it is clear that the case against Mr. Agnew is grave. From the U.S. attorney, George Beall, to the Attorney General Elliot Richardson, those responsible for the prosecution are serious men, well known for support of the Nixon administration, and with no axes to grind against the Vice President. Yet they felt the allegations against Mr. Agnew warranted a formal notification and a very tough letter requesting extensive personal records.

Moreover, the response by the rest of the administration has hardly been reassuring. The President has not come personally to the defense of his Vice President. Mr. Agnew's first response—an affirmation of faith in the



By Fischetti in the Chicago Daily News

'I'm Behind You 1000 Per Cent.'

system of criminal justice—read like the confession of a man who hoped to get off easy. His second response—the press conference of last week—was tough in manner but very cagy on points of law.

For example, Mr. Agnew asked for time to consider whether executive privilege might forbid his handing over documents to the prosecution. But if the charges really were "damned lies," as he said, his interest would be to waive the privilege at once in order to surface the records that prove his innocence.

Finally, Maryland, like New Jersey and Illinois, is one of those states where the political tradition is dirty. As a county executive and governor,

Mr. Agnew played the game, to put it mildly.

The most Mr. Agnew can hope for, accordingly, is to avoid indictment because of lack of proof. Even in that case some sleazy associates and dubious past practices are bound to become widely known. At best, in other words, the Vice President will emerge bloodied and bowed.

But a tarnished Agnew still in place is Mr. Nixon's best possible defense against Watergate. For if it becomes clear that forcing Mr. Nixon out meant bringing Mr. Agnew into the White House, almost everybody, and especially the Democrats, would draw back from pressing Watergate to the hilt against the President.

The converse works, if the case against Mr. Agnew develops into an indictment or some other clear showing of illegal activities. A finding against Mr. Agnew would add cogency to the Watergate revelations.

It would reinforce the impression of a President surrounded by men of no distinction who regularly used dishonest tactics and consistently lied on the most serious subjects. It would add a name which has become a household word to the list—Mitchell, Dean, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Colson—that has already come to symbolize the absence of trust and confidence.

Moreover, if it became a question of removing the Vice President, there would be set in motion a process extremely dangerous to Mr. Nixon. The 25th amendment provides that a Vice President is replaced by a figure nominated by the President and confirmed "by a majority of both houses of Congress."

Once that procedure began, Mr. Nixon would be obliged to negotiate with the Democratic leaders of the Congress on the most intimate features of his rule. It would be a case of the sovereign arranging for regency with his political opponents. Forcing out the President by impeachment or other means, which is now almost unthinkable in both houses of Congress, would become a thing the Congress could not avoid thinking about.

So despite the distances Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew are plainly taking from each other, the President's case is, in practical political terms, inextricably mixed up with the case of the Vice President. Together they will sink or swim.