

Unusual TV Statement

Agnew Denounces

'Leaks' in His Case

He Accuses Justice Department

Washington

Besieged by published reports that he faces imminent indictment in Maryland's contractor kick-back scandal, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew charged yesterday that "some Justice Department officials have decided to indict me in the press whether or not the evidence supports their position."

In an unusual statement before live television and a roomful of reporters in the Executive Office Building, Agnew specifically demanded that Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson investigate what he called "a clear and outrageous effort to influence the outcome of possible grand jury deliberations."

At the same time, Agnew pressed his offer to discuss the case directly with U.S. Attorney George Beall, heading the investigation in Baltimore.

REMINDER

Publicly reminding Beall that the Justice Department had informed his lawyers that "the way is open for the vice president to talk to the prosecutors if he wishes," Agnew snapped:

"I do wish. I hope that the way remains open. It is through proper investigation of all the facts that the truth will emerge — not through trial by headline nor by hearing only part of the story."

Beall, after listening to

Agnew on the radio in his Baltimore office, said he stands by his statement of August 8, denying that the prosecutors have "in any way been the source of any information reported by the media concerning this investigation."

The U.S. attorney said he is "gravely concerned"

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about leaks in the case and "will continue to preserve the secrecy of the proceedings until such time as public disclosures can properly be made."

Beall also denied that his office does not want to meet with Agnew. "This is not true," he said. "We have not reached a conclusion, and this is under study. Indeed, the whole investigation continues under active study, including the possibility of an interview."

RICHARDSON

Richardson joined in Beall's denial of leaks coming from government investigators. "I fully share the vice president's concern about unfair and inaccurate publicity," he said. "I stand

by my previous statement that the Justice Department has not been and will not be the source of such publicity.

"By observing restraint in what they report, the media themselves can help to assure fairness. I would like to point out, moreover, that we do not have any firm basis for the assumption that the information which has appeared in the press has come from law enforcement officials.

"In any case, any plausible lead implicating the Department of Justice will be pursued vigorously, and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against any de-

partment employee found to be responsible."

REPLY

Richardson also released his reply to a complaint

from the American Civil Liberties Union that Agnew's rights were being violated by the leaks to the press.

The attorney general said he shared the ACLU's concern, but he disputed as "unwarranted and unfair" an ACLU contention that the leaks could only have come directly or indirectly from law enforcement officials. Richardson asked the ACLU for any evidence it had to substantiate the charge.

Agnew, looking tanned but more hollow-cheeked than in his press conference on August 8, noted that Richardson in a television interview on Sunday had denied that any of the leaks in the Agnew case had come from his department and had said he would investigate any suggestion they had.

"I have communicated with the attorney general today and have asked that he fulfill that promise and pursue such an investigation vigorously," Agnew said.

"I hope that the national news media will also urge Mr. Richardson and the Justice Department to conduct such an investigation diligently, wherever it may lead, and to use all available investigatory tools to compel sworn testimony to reveal the identity of 'unnamed Justice Department officials' and 'sources close to the investigation.'"

STORY

Agnew based his complaint specifically on a story in this week's issue of Time magazine, which said that "in the view of Justice Department officials in Washington, the case against him is growing steadily stronger,

and that an indictment appears inevitable."

In the face of such reports, Agnew again yesterday said he "will fight to prove my innocence" and that he intends "to remain in the high office to which I have been twice elected."

Agnew took the extraordinary step of attacking the attorney general and Justice Department of his own Administration after having advised the White House of his intention to meet the press, although not of the substance of what he would say.

White House deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren reported that the Vice President in his notification "did not go into details."

CONTRAST

It was Agnew's second televised meeting with reporters here in two weeks — at a time President Nixon has been under increasing criticism for not holding a press conference to discuss his own Watergate troubles. It was billed by Agnew's office as a "press conference" but at the outset of his eight-minute statement, which he read, the Vice President said he would entertain no questions.

This was so, he said, "not because I want to avoid the facts, not because I do not wish to see you fully informed, but because to do so would be to continue discussion in a public forum of what should be a secret investigation. By such a free-wheeling discussion, I would be engaging in the very same tactics that I called you here to criticize."

In advance of Agnew's press conference yesterday, deputy press secretary Warren again expressed the President's confidence in Agnew, but said Mr. Nixon would not comment on the leaks, which he said were a matter for Richardson's attention.

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