

The Agnew Affair: An 'Osmotic Conspiracy'

The following interview with Victor Gold, former press secretary to Vice President Agnew, took place on the Today Show on Sept. 26. The questions are Edwin Newman and Bill Monroe.

Q: Victor Gold, is there a conspiracy against the Vice President?

A: No, there's not a conscious conspiracy because if — as we know through the Watergate case — if any two or three of these people got together they'd mess it up somehow. There's no conscious conspiracy, but it's what I call an osmotic conspiracy, by a process of osmosis a number of people—the same wonderful folks who brought us Watergate have gotten together and find a great opportunity to get Watergate off the front page. Mr. Hunt, for instance, testified yesterday but we don't read about that today. We're reading all about the Vice President's problems.

Now, I happen to find that very coincidental. It may happen that this just happened that way. But you've had the same characters. You have Mr. Petersen, who's in charge of the Watergate investigation. Mr. Petersen, who now says he has a very strong case against Vice President Agnew, also said he had a very strong case against the Watergate-7, and it was a strong case built on perjured testimony, as we know.

The same type of people are involved here as were involved in Watergate and it does serve—I ask the Latin question, if you don't mind my indulgence in Latin, "Cui Bono"—who benefits? And quite obviously Watergate's off the front page, the people are now talking about the Vice President resigning. The people are now talking about the Vice President being impeached, whereas six weeks ago they were talking about the President.

Q: Well, Victor, you're talking about the President's wanting Mr. Agnew to quit?

A: The President wants to get off Watergate. The President says we ought to get on to the very serious problems of this country. Now, I haven't heard him say this about the Vice President's problems, I might point out. I haven't heard him say yet

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to date . . . why don't we get off of this. He is not—and the people at the White House aren't—particularly interested in seeing the Vice President's dilemma solved. They didn't greet the Vice President's dilemma, I think, by tearing hair and gnashing their teeth.

Q: Does the President want the Vice President to quit, in your view?

A: I can't testify to what the President might want. It's very difficult sometimes to figure out what Mr. Nixon might want because they might be saying one thing at the White House at one end, and on the East Wing they're liable to be saying something else.

Q: Do you believe the President . . . approved the Attorney General's statement yesterday that he was going to take the case to the grand jury?

A: Well, the Attorney General is his appointee. Mr. Petersen, of course, has been staying on—and he also stays at the pleasure of the President. The Attorney General has been serving on the one issue that's most vital to Mr. Nixon, that issue of the tapes. The At-

torney General is with Mr. Nixon on the tape issue. So I think that's why we say there's no conspiracy, but there's an osmotic conspiracy. By osmosis a group of people all of whom happen to be Nixon appointees, including Mr. Beall, down in Baltimore.

Q: A group of people including the President?

A: Well, of course, it serves the President's purposes. Look, if you just judge what the President has not said publicly, not by what he said . . . (but) what the President doesn't say when he's asked, "Do you support the Vice President?" Now, the Vice President supported the President very clearly on Watergate. He was loyal in that way. But loyalty

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alty is a one-way street with the Nixon administration, obviously, because there isn't the same thing.

Q: Vic, may I ask you another question? Has the Vice President been bargaining with the Justice Department or with anybody else?

A: Now that's the type of thing we're talking about . . . that type of leak comes from the Justice Department, and that type of information has been leaking from the Justice Department.

But look at the situation we're living in in this country. A grand jury hearing — and I happen to be a lawyer in addition to my other vices—a grand jury hearing is supposed to be a secret hearing. It's shocking that the Attorney General of the United States yesterday gets up and makes a public declaration of things going before a grand jury.

We've had seven weeks of this business of attrition and erosion of the Vice President's position in the public print. That is, I believe, why the Vice President says . . . Let's take it before the people's tribunal and let's lay it all out there. Let the people hear what's going on, not what Mr. Richardson and Mr. Petersen and the other people in charge of this investigation want to leak to the press. Because we know if a grand jury hearing goes on we're going to get leaks—we've had leaks for seven or eight weeks.

Q: Victor, no doubt that there have been leaks from within the Justice Department. Have the leaks been accurate in regard to plea bargaining going on?

A: That's outrageous . . . it's obviously Mr. Petersen. Mr. Petersen has not rushed to any microphones to deny this type of thing. Mr. Petersen says . . . we're not going to have any plea bargaining, I have a strong case. Well, he said he had a strong case against Watergate too. It was based on Jeb Magruder's testimony. That type of thing is outrageous. I would find it incredible.

The Vice President is not a man going to go up there and say, "I'll trade you the Vice Presidency for getting off on something." That's outrageous to think that the American public would accept this. But it's the contempt these people have for the intelligence of the American public to think they can put a story like that out and people will buy it. It's the Watergate mentality.