

Agnew Loosed Attack After Weeks of Anger

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

Special to The New York Times

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif., Sept. 30—Associates of Vice President Agnew said today that his denunciation of the Department of Justice for its conduct of the criminal investigation against him was the product of weeks of having dwelt "on the dark side of an inferno."

As the Vice President relaxed here today at the desert estate of Frank Sinatra and Republicans across the country expressed support for Mr. Agnew, his associates described the origins of the startling, largely impromptu attack he made yesterday.

They said that Mr. Agnew deliberated aloud yesterday at the Sinatra estate about whether to end a long period of private consternation by openly

criticizing the Government's handling of the case.

Perhaps, the Vice President reportedly told close friends at breakfast, he should get one or two things off his chest but continue to contain his anger and his attitude because it would "not be good politics" to vent it openly.

Barely two hours later — having donned a conservative pin-striped suit, been driven to the nearby Palm Springs airport, traveled by Air Force Jet-Star to Los Angeles, and learned that his speech to the National Federation of Republican Women would be telecast live to the nation — Mr. Agnew exploded.

After delivering a prepared

Continued on Page 27, Column 3

The New York Times

Published: October 1, 1973

Copyright © The New York Times

Agnew Loosed Attack on Justice Department After Weeks of Mounting Anger

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

speech, the Vice President accused Henry E. Petersen, the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Maryland investigation, of having selected him as a "big trophy" with which to recoup the reputation lost by the department through the "ineptness" of its Watergate investigation.

He declared that he was "innocent of the charges" being leveled against him in "perjured" testimony of "small and fearful men." And, in a refrain that brought 1,200 Republican women to their feet, he asserted, "I will not resign if indicted. I will not resign if indicted."

It was, according to one of Mr. Agnew's associates who had watched the Vice President build up to the outburst, as unexpected as it was intense.

The associates said that the proximate cause of Mr. Agnew's wrath was a statement by the Justice Department on

Friday in response to a legal bid by the Vice President's lawyers to block the presentation of evidence against him to a Federal grand jury in Baltimore.

The statement said that there was "no basis whatsoever — in fact or in common sense," for the charge by Mr. Agnew's lawyers that officials of the department had leaked information to the press in an effort to prejudice the proceedings against the Vice President. It went on to suggest that Mr. Agnew had precipitated the leaks by disclosing on Aug. 8 that he was under investigation.

A Day of Fuming

All day Friday, as he golfed with Mr. Sinatra on the Tamarisk Country Club course bordering the singer's million-dollar estate and rested at one of the four guest houses in the hideaway, the Vice President was said to have fumed about the statement. He re-

portedly talked of "going public" with a rejoinder and began mentally sketching its outlines.

"But he tamped it all down at breakfast" the next morning, an associate said. "He said it would not be good politics" to spell out what was on his mind, but decided to make "one or two points" after completing the delivery of a prepared speech on the need for secrecy in the grand jury process to protect the innocent.

The Vice President's aides passed the word to newsmen at the Los Angeles Convention Center that Mr. Agnew would make some pointed comments at the end of the address. He did, without notes, and "once he got started it was as if he couldn't stop," the associate later remarked.

Mr. Agnew referred to having "been living in purgatory" because of unspecified charges against him. He said that the violations of grand jury secrecy were not his fault but

"deliberate, contrived actions" of Government prosecutors. The Aug. 1 letter received from United States Attorney George Beall in Baltimore, notifying him that he was under investigation, was made available to The Wall Street Journal even before he received it. Mr. Agnew declared.

'Plea Bargaining'

The associates said that the Vice President regretted his omission of one point that had troubled him—the published speculation that he had sought to make a deal with the prosecutors, offering to resign if the charges were dropped—and that he later wished he had denied those accounts on television.

Instead, he told a group of Republican officials with whom he met after the speech that the "plea bargaining" had been initiated by the Justice Department and had never been seriously considered by him. His aides then let newsmen

know of the private discussion.

By the time Mr. Agnew and his wife, Judy, returned to their weekend retreat at 70-588 Frank Sinatra Drive in Rancho Mirage, the Vice President was said to be relieved at having unburdened himself of resentments that he previously had expressed only in private.

At least one member of Mr. Agnew's traveling party expressed the belief that the Vice President's televised speech had been attributable in part to his sojourn in the desert.

"I don't know what it is about this place," the associate said, "but it seems to charge him up."

One possible reason for that could be the remoteness of the Palm Springs resort area from the customary worries of Washington.

Behind the high oleander hedges and the gate bearing a "Beware of Dog" sign, the Sinatra property can be an exile. The compound's \$100,000 kitchen has a professional staff.

There are tennis courts, swimming pools and, in a one-time railroad car, saunas and exercise equipment.

Privacy is a certainty. Outside the gates of the Sinatra compound are an assemblage of police cars, and inside, to bolster Mr. Sinatra's private security detail, are members of the Vice President's Secret Service detail.

Many of the Sinatra neighbors are content to rely on large signs in their front yards that bear the warning, "Patrolled by Tamarisk Security Officers." Others opt for the protection of a moat that surrounds nearby Desert Island Country Club, where one-bedroom condominiums start at \$55,000. It is expensive, but, as the advertisement for Desert Island stated the case in "Palm Springs Life, Magazine of the Desert Empire":

"Can you really put a price on long days of sun-warmed relaxation and freedom from pressures?"