

Vice President Who Extolled the Old Virtues

Spiro Theodore Agnew

By MARTIN ARNOLD

Until his trouble, the life of Spiro Theodore Agnew seemed to be a cliché American story. It was the tale of a man whose father and kin came from the remote, rugged hills and rock of the Peloponnesus in Southern Greece. The father wanted to escape the dreariness of his life as a notary public, and so, in 1911, set sail for the United States, where Mr. Agnew was born and rose to be Vice President of the United States.

Perhaps it was the peculiar rootlessness of the immigrant son situation, but whatever the cause his life and career had continuous change. He was the chemistry major in college who became a lawyer; the Democrat who became a liberal Republican; the liberal who became a conservative, the P.T.A. chairman who became Governor of Maryland and then Vice President.

Mr. Agnew became in many areas a popular political figure, as the immigrant's son telling it like it ought to be.

Term for Doves

He added "radic libs" and "macropygia" to the American lexicon, the latter his term for Senate doves. He tossed off such phrases as "pusillanimous pussyfooting" and "nattering nabobs of negativism."

When people were criticizing America, he was sticking up for the old virtues. If his background made him somewhat pragmatic, it also made him a man who appreciated the opportunity inherent in the system, and so he could even laugh at the Spiro Agnew wristwatches and T-shirts and dart boards.

As for his background and tastes, his mother was Virginia born. He is a native of Baltimore, a veteran, an Episcopalian, married and the father of four children; a grandfather; a man who likes the piano, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald; a golfer who likes football, televised sports, tennis; a reader of James Michener. He does not smoke, drinks sparingly, dresses impeccably, likes chocolate and is beginning to be slightly bald.

Frank Sinatra is his friend. So is Bob Hope. The American Conservative Union proudly proclaimed him "the most controversial Vice President since Aaron Burr."

"Spiro T. Who?" asked a Washington correspondent when Richard M. Nixon announced that he had chosen

Mr. Agnew as his running mate. "Mine is not a household name," Mr. Agnew acknowledged.

Yet it was to become one. And he did it with words, some in jest, some serious. He called one Japanese-American reporter a "fat Jap," and Polish-Americans "Polacks." He explained his decision not to visit an urban ghetto this way: "When you've seen one slum, you've seen them all." He made firm statements about maintaining law and order, about overhauling social welfare programs.

The most dramatic chapter in his career started as the church bells tolled noon on Capitol Hill on Jan. 20, 1969, and Spiro T. Agnew, whose original family name was Anagnostopoulous, was sworn in as the 39th Vice President.

His political experience had consisted of three years as an appointed member of the local zoning appeals board in Baltimore County, four years as Executive (Mayor) of that suburban county, and less than two years as Governor of Maryland.

In 1950, while Mr. Nixon was successfully campaigning for the Senate, Mr. Agnew was strolling in a Baltimore supermarket, wearing a white grocery clerk's smock with a button pinned on the chest that said, "no tipping."

The Washington Post said, in an editorial, that "given enough time, Nixon's decision to name Agnew as his running mate may come to be regarded as perhaps the most eccentric political appointment since the Roman emperor Caligula named his horse a consul."

The New York Times, in an editorial on the choice of running mate, said that while Mr. Agnew was an official in Maryland, his closeness to a group of land speculators and a bank involved "clear and repeated conflicts of interest."

In many respects, Mr. Agnew represented a new kind of politician, the archetypal man of the suburbs, emerging a generation after post-World War II flight to the suburbs began. Like many suburbanites, he grew up in the city, but as he became older and more affluent, and the city became more the home of the black, poor, he chose suburbia.

He became a Kiwanias and a member of the suburban high school P.T.A. He served on community councils, and along the way, switched from the Greek Orthodox faith of his fathers to the Episcopal

Church, from the immigrant shelter of the Democratic party to the Republican party.

In Baltimore, Mr. Agnew's father had met and married a widow, Mrs. Margaret Akers Pollard, who had a son, W. Roy Pollard Jr., born 11 years earlier than Spiro T. Agnew Jr., whose birthdate was Nov. 9, 1918. Mr. Agnew's half-brother died yesterday.

His father opened one restaurant, and then another, but during the Depression he lost both. So he rented a pickup truck, from which he peddled vegetables on the streets of Baltimore. Young Spiro helped him.

The elder Agnew never insisted that his son learn Greek, which he didn't do, but the father took an active part in the Greek community. Before he would speak to local Greek clubs, his son would write the speeches and the elder Agnew then translated them into Greek.

University Dropout

The man who was to become Vice President was graduated from high school in 1937, and entered Johns Hopkins University. He majored in chemistry and despite a reported I.Q. of 135, did poorly. He dropped out of the university, and entered the then unaccredited University of Baltimore law school. He attended classes at night, working by day as a file clerk in an insurance company.

It was there that he met Elinor Isabel Judéfind, "Judy," who later recalled, "Spiro says he tripped over me in the file room." In September, 1941, six months after their engagement, Mr. Agnew was drafted into the Army and sent to Officers Candidate School. In 1942, three days after he was graduated, they were married, and lived at Fort Knox, Ky.

Mr. Agnew became a company commander in the 10th Armored Division in Europe, serving in four campaigns. While he was away, their first child, Pamela Lee, was born in 1943. A son, Randy, was born in 1946; a daughter, Susan, in 1948, and a daughter, Kimberly, in 1956.

Upon return from the war, he was admitted to the Maryland bar. The following year, 1947, he opened his own law firm, which, he said, "failed miserably." He worked first as an insurance adjuster, and then as an assistant manager of a supermarket.

In 1951, he was recalled to the service, but was not sent to Korea. Mustered out, he

worked briefly in at least three different law firms, moved to the suburbs, and, in the words of his wife, "He kind of spread out."

He became president of a community council; and, in 1957, a minority member of the County Board of (zoning) Appeals, and later became its president, only to be ousted by the controlling Democrats.

It was not until 1960, eight years before he was elected Vice President, that he won his first elective office, Executive of Baltimore County. To win, he took advantage of the internecine warfare among the Democrats and used his reputation as a civic do-gooder. "It was a sorta happy accident," he recalled.

During his administration, the county became one of the first in the nation to enact a public accommodations law. Mr. Agnew was credited with speeding the building of many new, and much needed, schools. In 1966, he was elected Governor, after the state's Democrats were again beset with internal warfare. He ran a razzle-dazzle campaign, financed, he said, by "the Greek millionaires of New York."

In the state capital, he gained a reputation as a competent although not brilliant Governor. He was the first Maryland Governor to appoint a black to his personal staff, and he issued a code of fair employment practices. He also named blacks to the courts. His governorship was characterized by energy.

Stocked With Wines

It was there, too, that he was first criticized for his ethics, because his friends had not only stocked his mansion with fine wines, but also raised money to help him pay for the entertainment of visiting dignitaries.

He became taken with Governor Rockefeller, and actively supported him for the Presidency until the Governor pulled out of the nomination race. Increasing, Mr. Agnew took a law and order stance, and became, in part because he was from a border state, Mr. Nixon's choice for Vice President.

Ahead of him was high office, and the fame of a candid man who did the tough campaigning for the President, who took on what he called the "effete snobs" of the press and television, who made for the Administration antagonists in the Eastern liberal press.

The immigrant son was to become famous not only as a Vice president, but also as a gut fighter.



Spiro T. Agnew being sworn in for a second term as Vice President by Chief Justice Warren E. Burger as the President and Mrs. Agnew watched