

Comic Anecdotes on Peddling

Reviewed by

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In 1964 Vic Gold became a minor folk hero to reporters when he joined the press office of Sen. Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign and aggressively defended such journalistic rights as the placing of the press bus right behind the candidate's car and the providing of laundry service on overnight stops. He was superb at the care and feeding of reporters, who were regarded by most of the rest of the Goldwater entourage as a necessary nuisance barely to be tolerated.

Two years ago when Spiro Agnew came under attack, Gold, who had served a couple of years as the vice pres-

ident's press secretary, rose to Agnew's defense with the same pugnacity that he used in asserting reporters' campaign needs. Gold supported Agnew right down to the day he resigned.

Gold's book is entertaining but disappointing. He tells some good stories but he is also on the surface of things. Perhaps that says a lot about why he chose public relations as a career for so many years, even though he was trained as a lawyer. PR, as he calls his former profession, too often is nothing more than fluff.

It can of course be deadly serious, as it was during the Nixon administration when Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Ziegler, Dean, Colson and all the rest put PR ahead of any sort of substance.

Nixon himself treid to handle the Watergate scan-

Book World

I DON'T NEED YOU WHEN I'M RIGHT: The Confessions of a Washington PR Man. By Vic Gold.

(Morrow, 218 pp. \$6.95.)

dal, which eventually brought about his resignation, as a minor PR problem to be dealt with in the same manner that a press agent would handle a publicity campaign for a corporate president or a political candidate.

But the stories in the book are good. A particularly hilarious one involves a golf foursome made up of Nixon, Agnew, Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope. The burning issue was who was to sit with whom in the two-passenger golf carts. Nixon wanted to sit with Sinatra to get to know him better. But that would push Hope's nose

further out of joint. The PR solution was to add a fifth to the party — Ronald Reagan, then the governor of California. As governor, he of course had to sit with Nixon.

Other stories concern Gold's heroic efforts to tie in scotch-drinker Winston Churchill's name with a Kentucky bourbon promotion and Clare Booth Luce into a gimmick to help Pan American coffee growers. There is also a touching account of a four-month struggle over whether Agnew would represent the President at a Gridiron Club dinner. It seems that Agnew

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would not go unless personally asked by Nixon, who never could get around too making a telephone call for that purpose. Finally, a week before the dinner, Nixon sent direct word to Agnew. Or at least H. R. Haldeman made Agnew think it was direct.

What is disappointing about Gold's book is his failure to talk much about Agnew or Nixon. Gold presumably was close to Agnew and could help explain the man. He also probably knows a lot about how the Nixon White House worked. He also probably knows a lot about how the Nixon White House worked.

Gold does note in discussing Nixon that "despite his feeling that he was the best PR man in the business . . . Nixon's public relations instincts were actually those of a political wind-up doll. He had a lawyer's — not a PR man's — mind."

As for his relation with Agnew, Gold sums them up by saying: "Like it or not, all top-level PR advisers are wired to their paymaster's gut. Agnew was typical of clients in the upper echelons of the political and business power structure. The higher

the client's status, the less he needs — of feels in his gut he needs — counsel about what he ought to be doing and how he ought to be doing it."

Gold, now a Washington columnist, concludes his book by noting that, "in one of the most dynamic eras of cultural and political transition in our country's history, the role of the profession, attached to his Establishment base, has been that of reacting to, rather than manipulating, swift moving events."

After pointing out that during his 15 years as a PR man, black, youth and consumer revolutions occurred together with a revolution in attitudes toward sex and women, Gold continues: "And what were Vic Gold and his expert fellow manipulators doing while all this was going on? Dreaming up shticks for the grand opening of Howard Johnson Motor Lodges. Trying to push candidates on the open market 'like so much Alka-Seltzer.'"

However bruised Gold's feelings may be, it is reassuring to realize that the major tides of change swell up from genuine needs and not from shallow manipulations of hired PR guns.