

Other Editors Speak

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Agnew In The Act

One is well advised to avoid tangling in debate with Spiro Agnew, a man of no mean forensic abilities.

For once, however, the vice president seems to have gotten the worst of it in a recent exchange of charges and countercharges regarding the Watergate hearings.

Mr. Agnew started it off in a speech in St. Louis in which he accused the committee headed by Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., of indulging in a "gross perversion of justice." By making both committee members and witnesses perform as players on "a spotlighted national stage," he said, the hearings are complicating the search for truth and may make it impossible for the Watergate guilty ever to be convicted. That is, they cannot get a good claim that because of all the publicity they cannot get a fair trial.

Interestingly enough, one of the sharpest reactions came from a Republican member of the committee, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., of Connecticut.

In the year since the break-in of Democratic campaign headquarters in Washington's Watergate complex, he said, "What truth has emerged has come from the press, the courts and the Ervin committee.

"Noticeably deficient from any contribution to the facts has been the President and the vice president of the United States."

Adding injury to insult, Weicker noted that the trial of Daniel Ellsberg, the White Panthers in Detroit, the "Camden 28" and 11 gambling, narcotics and bribery cases in Miami "were all prosecutions that were thrown out because of illegal conduct on the part of the executive branch."

A milder statement was that of Republican Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, who averred that the Ervin committee is doing "a fair and unbiased, nonpartisan job."

On the Democratic side, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana recalled that much of the information that led to convictions in the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s came from the Senate's investigation of the case, and he

expects the same thing to happen this time.

Said Mansfield's assistant, Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia:

"If Jack Ruby, after shooting Lee Harvey Oswald in full view of millions of television viewers, could get a fair trial by an

impartial jury; if Sirhan Sirhan, physically overcome by Rosie Greer in full view of shocked millions following the shooting of Sen. Robert Kennedy, could get a fair trial by an impartial jury; surely it will not be impossible to select an impartial jury in a far less dramatic and less emotional case involving Watergate offenders."

"Methinks," Byrd added, "the vice president doth protest too much."

Previously, numerous political observers had suggested that if the vice president has hopes of a presidential nomination in 1976, his wisest course would be to maintain a discrete silence about and aloofness from the whole Watergate mess.

Mr. Agnew has apparently chosen not to, no doubt from the highest motives, since he has been untouched by the spreading stain of Watergate and is in no danger of being touched.

But the telling blasts he incurred after his St. Louis statement indicate that neither he nor the cause of truth will be well served by more forays on his part onto the body-strewn field of Watergate. — Don Oakley, Newspaper Enterprise Association.