# Ford Was Indiscreet, Not Scandalous

*By Jack Anderson*

The Agnew affair points up the limitations of investigative reporting. The bloodhounds of the press are expected to sniff out scandal in high places with little more to guide them than their nose for news.

Two years ago, for example, we investigated whispers that Spiro T. Agnew had pocketed bribes from Maryland contractors. We went into Maryland armed only with a notebook and a pencil. But a notebook is no substitute for a subpoena, and a pencil is a poor prod compared to the Justice Department's power to grant witnesses immunity.

We were told about the pattern of payoffs. We even dug out two witnesses who admitted to us they had slipped cash payments to Agnew. But in each case, no one else saw the money passed, and the cash couldn't be traced. Eventually, we laid our findings before Agnew but he categorically denied everything. The evidence simply wasn't sufficient to accuse the Vice President of the United States of a crime. It took the Justice Department to do that two years later.

In contrast with Agnew, his designated successor, Gerald R. Ford, has a reputation for openess and honesty. Sources close to him say he won't accept cash contributions although he has a politician's constant need for campaign funds.

But we have never heard the slightest suggestion that he has ever diverted a dime to his own personal use.

The closest to a political skeleton we have found in his closet was a bespectacled lobbyist named Robert Winter-Berger, who had been associated with fixer Nathan Voloshen and convicted House aide Martin Sweig.

We reported on Jan. 27, 1970, that Winter-Berger "operated occasionally out of Ford's office." We stressed: "No one who knows Jerry Ford believes he would allow his name to be used by an influence-peddling ring. But in the back-scratching, favor - swapping environment on Capitol Hill, it is easy for a con man to take advantage of a congressman's potent name."

Two years later, Winter-Berger gave up lobbying and published his confessions in a book called "The Washington Pay-Off." He boasted of his dealings with Ford.

The vice presidential nominee has now made his files on Winter-Berger available to us. They show the lobbyist gained access to Ford on the recommendation of a trusted friend. The congressman's late administrative assistant, Frank Meyer, arranged some routine political favors for Winter-Berger's clients, such as writing a Ford endorsement for an organization seeking to standardize the world calendar and recommending International Mining President Frank Kellogg for a diplomatic appointment.

At Winter-Berger's behest, Ford also arranged an immigration extension for a Dutch psychiatrist, Dr. Albert A. Buytendorp, to continue his research work in the U.S. In a thank-you letter, Winter-Berger wrote Ford: "How wonderful it is to deal with your office. Everyone is also so eager to please, so correct and so efficient."

In return for these political favors, the lobbyist made a few nominal contributions to various GOP campaign chests. These donations ranged from $125 to $500. Ford thanked him for them in letters addressed "Dear Bob" and signed "Jerry."

It would appear that Ford's relationship with the lobbyist, although indiscreet, was not a serious scandal.

Footnote: Agnew once described Washington, D.C., as a "jungle," and declared fiercely it wasn't his jungle. He had just been elected governor of Maryland. I knew him well enough in those days to call him Ted. We talked as friends about his political future. I asked whether he might be looking beyond the State House in Annapolis to Washington 30 miles away. No, he said, he intended to stay out of that jungle. But the lure of power threw him into the forbidden jungle.

*BIG OIL* — The consumer-oriented Center for Science in the Public Interest warns in an unpublished report that the oil industry appears to be dividing up America into separate geographic markets.

While Big Oil always denied that it is carving up the country to control sales and prices, the center observes in its new study that, "the major oil companies (are) concentrating their market areas in certain geographic regions and disposing of their stations in other regions."

Exxon, for example, is building in the Northeast, Texas and Louisiana, but is braking in Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and Ohio, claims the center.

Gulf is reducing in a vast area of the North Central and Northwestern states, where Texaco is expanding. Similar expansions and contractions are occuring with Standard Oil of Indiana, Standard Oil of Ohio, Phillips, Atlantic-Richfield, Conoco, Sunoco and BP.

The center's study also shows how Big Oil undercuts its own dealers by using nonbrand names to compete with independents at lower prices.

The study recommends marketing at the pump only by independent dealers, a higher gas tax to force development of more efficient engines and a world police force to control oil pollution on the high seas by tankers and other ships.