

Agnew Disputes Account Of Wheat Inquiry Origin

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By JAMES T. WOOTEN SEP 22 1972

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NASHVILLE, Sept. 21—Vice President Agnew today labeled as "inaccurate" a report that the White House, in an attempt to avoid embarrassing him, ordered a fourth official investigation of American wheat sales to the Soviet Union.

After issuing a statement to that effect, the Vice President rebuffed reporters' questions on the subject and said he would discuss it no further.

In Washington, reliable sources said today that Caspar W. Weinberger, director of the Office of Management and Budget, was "astounded" to hear the Vice President say in Minneapolis Tuesday that an inquiry by the Federal Bureau of Investigation was already in progress.

The New York Times reported in today's editions that, with three inquiries already in progress, a fourth was requested by President Nixon yesterday after Mr. Agnew erroneously announced its existence on Tuesday.

Today Mr. Agnew issued this statement:

"The New York Times story is inaccurate—wrong in its

over-all conclusion and wrong in its particularities.

"Some errors are apparent from examination of the Vice-Presidential, press conference transcript. Some result from the notorious unreliability of 'Capitol Hill sources' regarding Presidential decisions and actions."

"We stand behind our previous statement on the matter."

Asked which of the Vice President's previous statements

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was referred to, Victor Gold, Mr. Agnew's press secretary, said, "The news conference in Minneapolis."

There, on Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Agnew announced that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had already begun an investigation of the profits of large grain exporters involved in the sale of American wheat to the Soviet Union. That evening, the bureau said it had no knowledge of any such inquiry, that none was in progress and that none had been requested.

The White House said today that there had merely been "a mix-up" in the timing of the announcement of the investigation.

Windfall Profits Charged

The controversy arises from allegations that grain exporters made windfall profits from the sale of 400 million bushels of wheat to the Soviet Union through premature knowledge of the sale that was not made available to wheat farmers.

According to trustworthy sources, Mr. Weinberger and Mr. Agnew discussed the controversy over the wheat sales prior to the Vice President's news conference in Minneapolis. During that conversation, the sources disclosed, Mr. Weinberger "merely suggested the idea" of an inquiry by the F.B.I.

"He [Mr. Weinberger] was not speaking with any knowledge of an already existing investigation," the sources said. "Neither did he understand that the Vice President believed such an investigation already existed."

The version offered by the source today was similar, but not identical, to stories that circulated yesterday to the effect that Mr. Weinberger had mentioned the investigation only in jest and that the Vice President had assumed or understood him to be serious.

Statements Quoted

Victor Gold, the Vice President's press secretary, said in Washington today that he could not say "that I do not know" that Mr. Weinberger spoke with Mr. Agnew about such an investigation.

The Vice President's exact words in Minneapolis were: "That investigation is in progress now."

In St. Louis, on Tuesday, after the F.B.I. had denied any knowledge of any such inquiry, Mr. Agnew said: "The investigation I referred to yesterday was one that would look into the matter..."

Yesterday, in Columbus, Ohio, he said: "Maybe I was, as a great admirer of the F.B.I., overestimating their ability to get moving on a problem as quickly as they could."

"I had word from the White House that the F.B.I. was going

to make this investigation. There wasn't any mix-up. It was simply a matter of the F.B.I. not receiving the instructions from the Department of Justice before the inquiry to the F.B.I. was made.

"I think it's all been straightened out by the...new conference at the White House today where it was verified that the F.B.I. will be making this investigation."

No Further Comment

At any rate, Mr. Agnew, on his first campaign swing into the South, was adamant in his decision today to leave the matter behind him. He sat next to Nashville's Mayor, Beverly Brily, as five separate questions on the subject of wheat sales were put to him during a news conference at the Sheraton Hotel here. After conceding that he had talked about the matter with Mr. Weinberger in

Minneapolis, he declined to offer any further comment.

"Here we are in the city of Nashville, Tenn., with one of the most skilled municipal leaders in the country, and you want to talk about something that is of no interest to anybody except those who want to follow up on it," he told one journalist.

The dispute has followed his campaign over nearly 2,000 miles and three days of travel, and as is customary amid the frenzy of a national campaign, many members of his staff were particularly sensitive to suggestions that there may be some communications gap between Mr. Agnew and the White House.