

Agnew Defends Nixon On Charges of Hiding

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By ROBERT B. SEMPLE JR.

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 2 — President Nixon's two most visible spokesmen—Vice President Agnew and Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary—defended Mr. Nixon today against complaints that he has been hiding himself and his views from the electorate.

In a speech before the 13th annual conference of United Press International editors and publishers, Mr. Agnew said the duty of a candidate was to go beyond "slogans" and "code words" to inform the voters of "his record and positions."

He described national campaigns as "a test of ideas, a trial by logic, reason, and evidence," and he left no doubt that he thought both he and the President were meeting that test.

Mr. Agnew spoke only hours after Mr. Ziegler, at his regular morning briefing, was asked to comment on charges that the President had been "hiding" himself in recent weeks.

These charges have come not only from George McGovern, the Democratic nominee, who has been trying to goad Mr. Nixon onto the campaign trail, but also from various newspaper commentators who have accompanied the President on his three campaign trips since the Republican convention.

The major complaints, which are being heard here with increasing frequency, are that the President has held only one news conference since the convention, that it is impossible to get close enough to him to question him on his views and visions, and that even key policy advisers — normally reachable when the President is in Washington—tend to become inaccessible on the campaign trail.

The essence of Mr. Ziegler's response was that it was difficult if not impossible for any President to hide himself. As for complaints that Mr. Nixon was shortchanging the voters by not personally taking his case to them, Mr. Ziegler cited the press of public business.

"He is attending to the matters of the Presidency," the press secretary said, a point also stressed by Mr. Agnew in response to a question from a member of his audience of editors this afternoon.

"How can you expect a man

to be President and candidate at the same time?" Mr. Agnew said. "We do not hide anything."

Mr. Agnew even lifted a leaf from Senator McGovern's book of campaign phrases when he said that the purpose of campaigning was not only to inform the electorate but also to learn from the electorate, "to become educated as to what the people he seeks to represent truly believe."

Whether the Vice President meant to hold Mr. Nixon to that standard was not clear, since the President has mingled little with ordinary citizens since the convention and has spoken more often than not to Republican or otherwise friendly audiences. Mr. Agnew, by contrast, has been on the road almost constantly for two weeks.

On other points, Mr. Agnew repeated charges that the Democratic nominee's foreign policy represented "myopic isolationism," in that it would, he said, lead to the abandonment of Vietnam as well as of other commitments.

Wide Range of Questions

He said that "no amount of verbal pyrotechnics on the part of a desperate opposition" could obscure Mr. Nixon's record in both foreign and domestic affairs. And, in an impromptu turn of phrase, he derided Mr. McGovern's charge that the Nixon Administration was the most "corrupt" in history.

"Burning ambition coupled with the prospect of defeat supersedes rationality," Mr. Agnew declared, drawing laughter from the audience.

As if to show his own willingness to submit to cross-examination, Mr. Agnew answered a wide range of questions and prompted the audience to ask more when they seemed to be running dry.

He broke little new ground in most of his answers, but delivered a spirited defense of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, one of his political patrons in 1968. He said he retained "complete confidence" in Mr. Mitchell, despite recent charges that Mr. Mitchell controlled a special fund that has been linked with the Watergate bugging episode.