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An Envied Agnew Is Facing Hazy Future

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 19 — When Spiro T. Agnew takes the oath of office tomorrow for his second term as Vice President of the United States, he will, understandably, be an object of envy.

In six short years, the Greek immigrant's son who once sold vegetables on a Baltimore street corner has become one of the most talked about politicians in the country, and on the eve of the President's second four years in office, it is Mr. Agnew who is talked about most as the man most likely to succeed Mr. Nixon as the Republican nominee.

"He's on top," said Victor Gold, his recently resigned press secretary. "He's really on

top of the world."

Nevertheless, among those who, like him, have given thought to his future, the 54-year-old Vice President is not only the object of unmitigated envy, but of considerable doubt, substantial scorn, and no little compassion as well.

There are many who are dubious about his political fortunes, others who belittle his political acumen, and still others who pity him as a man whose political tomorrows, in their view at least, are not altogether his own.

"Contrary to what most people believe," said United States Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, a former Vice President who also wanted the White House for home, "it isn't the most enviable position in the world,

either from the standpoint of getting the nomination or winning the election."

The Senator, who was the only public official who agreed to discuss Mr. Agnew on the record, was merely one voice in a chorus of experienced politicians who suggested that the Vice President's future was primarily dependent not on his own strength, ambition or charisma, but on the man who takes the oath of office as President on Saturday.

If things do well for the second Nixon Administration, and if President Nixon is favorably inclined toward Mr. Agnew's candidacy, the Vice President would have the inside track on the Republican nomination and

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perhaps the Presidency, they reasoned.

But if the country sours on Mr. Nixon or Mr. Nixon lacks any enthusiasm for Mr. Agnew's hopes, "you've got a whole new ball game," as one Midwestern Republican in the Senate said.

"If you're part of a team, you're part of the team," Senator Humphrey said. "If things go badly you can't just run up in the grandstands and start rooting for the other side."

Yet there is probably considerably more to Mr. Agnew's political future than the country's future attitude toward him, for from a tactical point of view, his actual duties and visible activities over the next four years are equally important.

Constitutionally, Mr. Agnew is the president of the Senate. By appointment of Mr. Nixon, he is also a member of the Cabinet, chairman of its Economic Policy Committee, deputy chairman of the National Security Council and Domestic Council and chairman of the National Councils on Indian Opportunity and Aeronautics and Space.

None of these duties seem to hold much promise for political profit-taking.

Moreover, at his own request, the Office of Intergovernmental Relations has been taken over by the White House and he is no longer the chief liaison between the executive branch of Federal Government and its state and local counterparts.

Nixon Holding the Key

All of this, for those who speculate on the Vice President's future, leaves unanswered an essential question: What, precisely is Mr. Agnew going to be doing between now and 1976?

"What the President allows him to do," a Republican Representative from New England responded. "He has no funds, no staff, no airplane, no entree, no duties, no nothing except what he gets from the White House."

Mr. Gold said this week that Mr. Agnew's new responsibilities were "still a mystery, shrouded in enigma," but suggested that there were already plans for foreign travel.

Some state party leaders have suggested that the Vice

President had "not yet made his mark" in foreign affairs, and it is likely that he will be assigned extensive foreign travel to counter such criticism.

"But whatever the President lets him do and however well he does it, there are still two important factors to be considered," a Midwestern Republican Representative said. "How much does he want the nomination and what [former Treasury Secretary John B.] Connally decides to do."

The Nixon-Connally Link

Mr. Connally, it has been speculated, may shed his Democratic cloaks and return to the Nixon Administration for a second time as a prelude to a



1976 run for the Republican Presidential nomination.

"Agnew's real strength in the party is in the South and the West," Mr. Gold said near the end of the 1972 campaign — and if that is the case, an opponent like Mr. Connally, a conservatively inclined Texan, could create substantial problems.

Further, there are many White House insiders who talk in amazed tones about the affection and respect the President has for Mr. Connally. "He really holds him in a kind of awe," said one. "Connally is so forceful yet so relaxed — and the President likes that a lot."

What is more, many politicians here who have watched the taciturn Vice President over the last four years have serious doubts about both his skill and his drive as a candidate.

"If there's one thing in politics I can't imagine," ventured one Democrat in the House of Representatives, "it's Spiro slogging in New Hampshire snow in the winter of 1976."

Even if the Vice President alters what has been called his "restrained, relaxed and disciplined" campaign style, some

of his fellow Republicans and more of the Democrats, who cared to talk about it believe it will not be enough.

"He hasn't grown an inch since he's been in Washington," a Midwestern, Democratic Senator said.

"He can't seem to grasp what the bigger picture is coming to," said a Republican Representative.

Further, some within his own party have quietly begun to discuss what will be the effect on him of a recent wave of gossip about his relationship to Frank Sinatra and other entertainment celebrities whose lifestyles are frequently not ideal for a potential Presidential candidate.

Nevertheless, as the bands and the horses and the demonstrators and the police make their final preparations for the inaugural festivities on Saturday, there are few men who ever dreamed of being President who would not like to be wearing Mr. Agnew's gleaming shoes.

"After you talk about it from one end to the other," Senator Humphrey concluded, "it's really better to be there than not to be there."

Mr. Humphrey, turning to the much-in-vogue athletic image for politics, agreed. "If you're part of a team, you're part of the team and if things go badly you can't just run up in the grandstands and start rooting for the other side," he said.

Some Important Duties

Regardless of their perspectives, there is probably more to Mr. Agnew's political future than the state of the nation in 1976 or the country's attitude toward Mr. Nixon. From a tactical point of view, the Vice President's actual duties and activities over the next four years seem equally important.

Constitutionally, he has but a single day-to-day function. He is the presiding officer in the United States Senate, a job he tried to take seriously in the early days of his first term but that eventually came to bore him, according to associates.

He now spends less and less time serving in that capacity, and because it is not a position from which comes the kind of



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public notice he may require for his eventual candidacy, he is not expected to increase his presence there in the second term.

By appointment of the President, Mr. Agnew is also deputy chairman of both the National Security Council and the Domestic Council, as well as holding Cabinet status and rank — none of which holds much promise for political profit-taking.