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Agnew Proves There's Still Something to Laugh About

WASHINGTON—If it weren't for Spiro Agnew, the malaise which has overtaken the nation in the wake of Cambodia would be all-pervasive. But Agnew has reminded us once again that there are still a few things to laugh about. It was Vice President Alexander Throttlebottom in the musical comedy "Of Thee I Sing" who wired his opponent: "Congratulations on your sweeping victory and charge fraud in six states." And Agnew's speech of last Friday, while not as succinct, was almost equally funny.

There was first—the intimation that the press was responsible for the administration's terrible domestic defeat in Cambodia. (It will be a military victory because the Pentagon will say so.) As though any President could go barging into an invasion of another country without causing some concern among his countrymen.

As colleges close, the stock market plummets, our casualties in Vietnam and Cambodia increase and serious students of government wonder whether ours will work any more, only a man who knows the value of a good laugh during time of national tension could think of blaming it on the press. By this stroke alone, Agnew has made of himself a kind of uptight, suburban Will Rogers.

Only a man with the talent of a good standup comedian could have carried out Agnew's second great boffo. He referred to his critics with the following words: "Fulminating," "hysterical" (twice), "master of sick invective," "irresponsible," "apoplectic," "strident," "unbridled invective," "frenzied," "excitable," "vicious," "irrational" and "raving."

Then, with timing any vaudevillian would envy, he delivered the punch line: "Ladies and Gentlemen, you have heard

a lot of wild, hot rhetoric tonight (pause). None of it mine."

The Agnew performance is vaudevillian in another sense. As with any good comedian, his agents do not book him into cold towns. Even the New Yorker magazine was not for "the old lady from Dubuque." Agnew crosses and recrosses this great land of ours, from Birmingham to Montgomery, from Jackson to Hattiesburg, from Dallas to Houston, speaking out fearlessly wherever an audience of rich white Southern Republicans with \$500 and a tuxedo can be found.

He may never make the big apple and play the Palace, but as long as the Washington Post and the New York Times print his speeches in full, connoisseurs of humor in the big cities will come to know his work. Artemus Ward and Petroleum V. Nasby never played the big towns, but their works may be found in any standard anthology of humor.

It is no accident that some of Agnew's speech-writers come from "Laugh-In," and they have given him not only wisecracks but humorous themes to develop. His "schtick" is the use of the funny \$10-word. In the last two weeks he has given us "struthious" and "tomentose," which are real words, and "disincentive" and "permissivist," which are not.