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Agnew Asserts Campaign Criticism Is 'Hogwash'

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 12— Vice President Agnew defended tonight the tactics used by the White House in this year's election campaign and said that the voters had responded to "as positive a message as ever a political campaign offered the country."

He said he had "just one word—hogwash" for critics of the Nixon Administration who have described the election rhetoric of President Nixon, Mr. Agnew and some Republican candidates as "divisive, bitter, mean and negative" or have concluded that voters rejected the White House appeal for a more cooperative Congress.

The Vice President argued, as Mr. Nixon did last week, that the White House had gained an ideological, if not numerical, majority in the Senate and had staved off expected losses in the House of Representatives. He said a contrary analysis had been made by "various pursed-lip pundits with 20-20 hindsight [who] have heartburn over this campaign."

'Right Message' Used

Although he granted that Republicans had suffered setbacks in the Governorship races, Mr. Agnew said that where the campaign "fell short of our hopes I concede only that we undersold our message, for it was a good message for America and the right message for America."

The overriding objective was to improve the President's "precarious position in the United States Senate," Mr. Agnew said. The campaign, he continued, achieved that result by focusing on "the negative record" of Senators differing with the Administration on issues such as law and order and social unrest.

Mr. Agnew's comments were made in a speech prepared for delivery at a \$150-a-plate banquet at which the Republican-National Committee honored the Vice President for his campaign efforts. The speech was the latest attempt by the Administration to cast the most favorable light on the Nov. 3 results.

It may, however, have been more than mere post-election summation of a partisan viewpoint. There are increasing signs of division within the Republican party leadership and at the White House over the 1970 campaign tactics.

Heavy Infighting Seen

One high Administration official said privately that the campaign had opened up the same sort of infighting between conservatives and liberals that was part of the aftermath of the United States military incursion into Cambodia last spring.

Representative Rogers C. B. Morton of Maryland, the Republican national chairman, is known to believe that his party could have been more successful in the elections had the tone of its campaign speeches, set by the White House, been less rancorous.

One of Mr. Morton's aides said in advance of tonight's speech by the Vice President that he expected Mr. Agnew to "emerge like a butterfly from his lead cocoon" by softening his tone.

But Mr. Agnew continued tonight the trend advanced during the campaign — that "radical liberals" in the opposition had fostered a potentially destructive permissiveness among those to the left of center. Accordingly, his speech was seen by some observers as part of a struggle over the tone the President should adopt during the second half of his term.

Mr. Agnew said that the 1970 tactics had already produced desired results.

"In the heat of the campaign," he said, "a whole bevy of Democrats who spent the last three years cozying up to radical dissenters turned tail and ran, unclenching their fists in their frantic rush to middle ground."

"As they fled," he continued, "they stripped off their leather jackets, pinned on sheriff's badges, then turned to their constituents transformed — now all Wyatt Earp-y and swearing evermore to stand foresquare for law and order."

As a result of the elections, the Vice President contended,

the President will fare better on foreign policy, national defense, law and order and, to a lesser extent, on fiscal responsibility.

"In a Senate that has decided key issues by one-to-five-vote margins for the past two years, a two-to-four vote chance is parliamentary revolution," said the Vice President, who is the Senate's presiding officer.

He said that such a gain would be enough during the next two years to "help assure an honorable peace" in Southeast Asia, "save crucial elements of our national defense," slow or stop "fiscal folly," give the South representation on the Supreme Court and "dishearten political cohabitation with social anarchists."

Mr. Agnew summarized "some of the whimpering from our inveterate critics" as follows:

"If an opposition Senator marches with radicals and we call him to account, it's a smear. If an opposition Senator raises bail money for young anarchists who disrupt campuses and we call him to account, it is unfairly impugning his motives."

"If a virulent critic of the President and Vice President hurls the charge of racist, good reporting requires that it be printed without challenge to its veracity."

Mr. Agnew said it was clear "we have a great President" in Mr. Nixon, a man who struggled, he said, against a hostile Congress to wind down a runaway inflation and a runaway war. To argue that the campaign should have been conducted "only around the sterling qualities of our own candidates" is unrealistic, Mr. Agnew argued.

The stakes, he added, are not partisan political gains, but "the kind of nation that you and I will preserve" for young Americans who greeted him during the campaign, "excitedly and proudly waving their American flags."

"I love a good fight," Mr. Agnew said. "I wouldn't take anything for the assignment given me in the recent campaign."