

The Candid Spiro Agnew

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Nov. 2—Vice President Agnew has been accused of almost everything except a lack of saying right out what he thinks, and one of the attractive aspects of this compulsive candor is that he applies it to himself.

He doesn't ignore the fact that this city is wondering about whether he will be the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate next year, or pretend that speculation on the point is manufactured by his old antagonists in the Eastern liberal press. In fact, while he is more critical of the "effete snobs" of press and television than anybody else in this Administration, he is also more available to them and more willing to discuss their problems and his than anybody else in the capital.

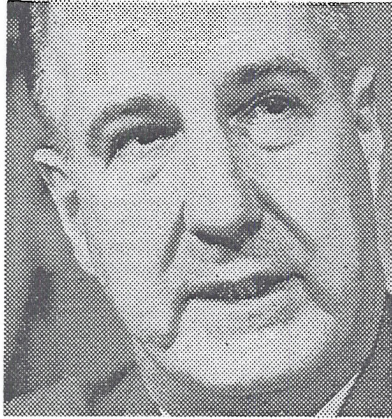
Are people wondering about his future? Well, he says, he wonders about it himself, but he doesn't worry about it. To him, this is a question for the President to decide. There is an illusion in this town, he says, that everybody fights for the ground he holds and struggles for power and position, regardless of private life, or the interests of the party, but he doesn't feel this way.

He will do what he is asked to do, he says: Get out, because home holds no terrors for him, or go on, if that is what the President wants him to do. It is interesting that he doesn't appeal primarily to the Republican party, where he has a stronger and more loyal conservative constituency than anybody else, including the President himself.

Whatever the President decides about a running mate next year, the Vice President is not going to appeal to this conservative element in the party, which is startled by the President's new welfare, new economic and new China and Soviet policies.

It would be very easy to do so. He obviously has his doubts about the wisdom of the President's pragmatic move to the left. He is much more

WASHINGTON



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ideological than his chief, but he is clearly not going to lead any charge against the President's policies, no matter what he thinks privately about it all, and he will undoubtedly leave the whole question about the Republican nomination of a Vice President to Mr. Nixon.

On the question of a different Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, if there is to be one, he is equally candid. Again, he defers to the President, but here he thinks the party in the nominating convention at San Diego will find that there are many Republicans who will want the job and feel that they have more claim on it than the Democratic Secretary of the Treasury, John Connally.

If it comes to a change, then there will, he thinks, be many Republican Senators and Governors who will make the argument for themselves, in opposition to Connally. Party loyalty, he says, is a powerful influence in nominating conventions, and in a way, Connally is in a comparable position to John Lindsay: able and attractive, but a new convert in a different party, who will not be easily accepted by the party faithful.

From the Vice President's own point of view, it is a sensible and honorable position. He did not choose the role he has played as Vice President. He has been the battering ram of the Republican party, assigned by the President, and as such he has been a divisive figure in American politics, always out front, scalding the opposition and in the process, making enemies and loyal supporters.

But the amiable thing about him is that he understands all this and is prepared to accept the consequences. If his usefulness has been destroyed in the struggle, he is willing to accept it and go back to Baltimore to his private life, or run again, or campaign for Mr. Nixon's re-election, even if he is dumped.

Not many men in the battle for personal, party and national power would be quite as relaxed in the struggle as he is. It is easy to argue against his philosophy and his pugnacious tactics, but at least he says in private what he says in public; and since very few politicians in Washington risk such candor, he is not a man to be lightly dismissed in the coming struggle of the Presidential campaign.