

# Agnew, Still Nixon's Man,

By Lou Cannon

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Vice President Spiro T. Agnew approaches his second term as a political heir-apparent who is uncertain that he will be able to claim the presidential legacy.

"He has been somewhat withdrawn since the election and he has said that he will do whatever Richard Nixon requires of him," says one of Agnew's close advisers. "But there is no question that the presidential nomination is firmly fixed on his horizon."

The prospects of that nomination appeared to be only a mirage after the 1970 election, when Agnew received much of the blame for a frequently bitter and usually negative campaign that ended in disaster for many optimistic Republican senatorial candidates.

But Agnew redeemed himself in 1972, making the most of what many considered a limited opportunity.

While President Nixon campaigned only rarely and almost exclusively for himself, Agnew traveled to every region of the country and earned points as a "party man" willing to assist other Republican candidates.

## Change of Image

In the process Agnew also reduced his reputation as a strident rhetorician. He proved accessible to the press, adept at answering most questions and, on occasion, even demonstrated a sense of humor about his new role. Answering a question in Los Angeles about the "new Agnew" four days before the election, Agnew replied:

"When I get up and look in the mirror, I say, 'What are you going to be today—are you going to be the old Agnew or the new Agnew?' If I feel good, I'm the new Agnew. If I feel bad, I'm the old one."

Agnew's 1972 efforts largely erased the belief prevalent among Republican politicians that he was a campaign liability effective only among ideological conservatives. However, it has not yet established him as an odds-on choice for a nomination that is still four years away.

"We've still got a long way to go but we've rid ourselves of the monster image," says one of the political realists around Agnew. "And we've done it without compromising principles."



Associated Press

Agnew on Agnew: Ridiculing the Vice President "is wearing thin on the people of our country. They know that Vice Presidents are people, not cartoon characters."

## Calls Self Centrist

While Agnew now calls himself "a centrist" after the manner of his political mentor in the White House, there is an unspoken but implicit assumption among his staff and supporters that he is the conservative choice within the party. This is what prompts most Agnewites to discount the budding political ambitions of Tennessee Sen. William Brock, now the chairman of the Senate Republican Campaign Committee.

Others who take Brock seriously believe that the Tennessee senator will never become a candidate unless events have removed Agnew from contention. Discounted even more than Brock are two Republican senators from the moderate-liberal wing of the party, Charles Percy of Illinois and Edward Brooke of Massachusetts. And Agnew still shares the view, which he has on occa-

## Looks Toward

## '76 Succession



sion expressed pungently in private conversation, that a Republican convention will never nominate John Connally.

Though Agnew believes that aging governors Nelson Rockefeller of New York and Ronald Reagan of California are capable of serious candidacies, the view is widespread among Agnew's staff and supporters that the Vice President can have the nomination for the asking in 1976 if he continues in the low-key style of 1972. In fact, some Agnewites define their task as putting the Vice President in position to win the nomination without a contest.

#### Grievance Vehicle

Agnew still sees himself as a person who, like Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace, expresses the grievances of ordinary citizens frustrated by a persistent inability to make themselves heard.

"Although my speeches in some areas have been received as divisive and provocative and that sort of thing, the basic result has been the letting off of a tremendous head of steam and frustration that had built up in a lot of people who think the way I do and have not been able to see those opinions refined and expressed the way I express them," Agnew said in an interview with *The Washington Post* last Sept. 28.

#### Views Unchanged

His views have not changed. Though the Vice President, again emulating President Nixon, has not been publicly accessible since the election, he still expresses his private concern over what he sees as the "philosophical negativism" of the press.

"This is one reason that

the 'low-profile' business shouldn't be exaggerated," cautions one Agnew adviser. "He still boils over when he reads stories that he considers tolerant toward permissiveness, immorality or lack of patriotism."

Agnew's personality is such that the longer he remains "low profile" the more likely it is that he will come out with a bluntly worded controversial statement. Even though he will avoid Republican fund raisers, with their customary requirement of "raw meat" speeches, he will be speaking throughout the country in the weeks ahead on the topics that trouble him most.

"The man" (as must Agnew staffers refer to the Vice President) is "naturally attracted to controversy and can avoid it only so long," says an aide.

It is what Agnew says in these speeches around the country that is more likely to determine public perception than his specific role in the second Nixon administration.

Ostensibly, his role as the administration spokesman to state and local governments was diminished when the Office of Intergovernmental Relations was merged into the Domestic Council.

Agnew has made light of his loss, believing that local government forums remain available to him whenever he wants them. During the next four years, he will also attempt to reach other segments of President Nixon's "new majority," specifically including labor unions and ethnic groups.

#### Travel Abroad

One clear desire of the Vice President in the second term — and one possible clue to President Nixon's own intentions where Ag-

new is concerned — is to travel abroad as the President's representative. Prospective missions include either a trip or a series of trips to Western Europe and to the Soviet Union.

On the staff level relations between top Agnew aides and the White House can best be described as correct but cool.

Most Agnew aides have never cared for domestic affairs assistant John D. Ehrlichman, whom some of the more conservative Agnewites regard as a secret liberal. They share the popular perception that the President's top aide, H. R. Halde- man, is solely concerned with Mr. Nixon's welfare. And they are somewhat uneasy about the tighter control that is being exerted from the White House on all operations, including the Vice President's.

At the same time, there is a pressure for status that affects Agnew's staff in much the same way that previous vice presidential staffs have been affected.

#### Not in Communion

"You would think that the White House staff and the Vice President's staff would be in communion, but it hasn't been that way," observes one Republican who is outside of the vice presidential operation. "One of Agnew's staff guys thought it was a big breakthrough to get a card for the White House mess where a lot of low-level people in the White House eat."

However, it is believed by many aides on Agnew's staff and in the White House that the President and Agnew have a mutual trust and confidence rare in the history of the presidency.

Agnew, in viewing the relationship from the Vice President's side, has never forgotten that he owes his national political career to Richard Nixon, a debt he put into a paean of political praise in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention.

The office, said Agnew, "has two primarily important functions — to serve the President and to learn from the President.

"Surely, much of the controversy about the vice presidency could be quieted if we would accept the fact that the Vice President is the President's man and not a competing political entity," he added.

In a second term, however, a Vice President who harbors ambitions for the presidency becomes something of a separate political identity if not a competing one. If he performs the President's assignments, and carries himself well, assume the Vice President's men, President Nixon will come naturally to an endorsement of Agnew because the Vice President will be perceived as the logical Republican candidate.

#### Changes Seen Needed

There is a widespread conviction extending beyond the White House staff that Agnew will have to make some staff changes of his own to conduct any presidential campaign. Criticisms of the Agnew staff have boiled over even in such conservative publications as the *National Review Bulletin*, which shortly before the election published an anonymous column detailing real and imagined staff errors.

It is likely if Agnew





United Press International

Council Bluffs, Iowa, students reach out to shake the hands of the Vice President after he gave a lecture.

emerges as a frontrunner for the presidential nomination or even as a serious contender, that he will draw upon prominent Republicans outside his present organization. One name that has been mentioned frequently is Bryce Harlow, former counsel and congressional liaison for President Nixon.

There will be some staff changes, also, and some reductions through attrition as Agnew does his part for the administration's economy wave. Victor Gold, the fiery press secretary, has already departed, though Gold is expected to have a continuing consultant relationship.

Since the election, Agnew has been described by those close to him as pensive, introspective and withdrawn.

#### **Proud of Achievement**

He remains, behind his impeccable exterior, a sensi-

tive person who is proud of his origins and the distance he has come from them. He has grown to accept ideological criticism, but he is unfailingly disturbed by stories that seem to make him out as a buffoon or that reflect on his abilities.

In the 1972 campaign, for instance, Agnew was particularly upset by a New York Times Magazine piece titled "Agnew is the Common Man Made Exceptional" which included what he considered a sneering reference to the Vice President's practice of naming his campaign planes after his daughters and granddaughters.

"Thus are aristocracies established by poor immigrant Greeks," read the offending sentence.

Such statements seem indicative to Agnew of a double standard in the press, which took him to task dur-

ing the 1968 campaign for supposed racial slurs. His sensitivity toward being portrayed as faintly ridiculous spilled over in a 1969 magazine article on "dangers of the media," which ended with these words:

"The game of 'Ridicule the Vice President,' played so enthusiastically over the years, is wearing thin on the people of our country. They know that Vice Presidents are people, not cartoon characters."

Whatever else Spiro T. Agnew may be as he enters his second term, he has long since overcome any notion that he is a "cartoon character." Whether the new view of Agnew's formidability also translates into a public perception that the Vice President is fit to be promoted to the presidency will be determined during the next four years.