

Frustrations of the Veep

WASHINGTON — One of the effects of the Watergate scandal has been to point up, sadly but irrevocably, the uselessness of the vice presidency.

It is a sad reflection upon both the constitutional executive arrangement and their personal relationship that the President has not turned to his heir - apparent for extensive counsel or support in this crisis, the toughest challenge leveled at White House authority in modern times.

VICE PRESIDENT Spiro Agnew has been loyally defending his boss in speeches and interviews. But the other day he conceded that he was uncertain about what his role might be during the rest of Nixon's term and literally pleaded openly with the President to give him something helpful to do. Echoing the complaint of past, modern Vice Presidents, Agnew said he was powerless and frustrated.

The Vice President has met alone with the President only once since the resignation of top White House aides. After that session, it was announced that Agnew would be given expanded duties, including vice chairman of the domestic council. But the council chairman, Kenneth Cole Jr., hastily assured reporters that Agnew would merely be a consultant. And the President has yet to spell out what Agnew's new responsibilities might be.

Agnew has not been touched by the widening scandal, because it has been clear for several years that the White House staff that supervised the clandestine operations

treated him as an outsider not to be consulted, informed, or trusted. John Ehrlichman, in particular, was hostile and insulting to Agnew and encouraged rumors that the President preferred ex-Treasury Secretary John Connally over Agnew as his White House successor.

On the surface, it would appear that Agnew was in an ideal position to counsel a beleaguered President suddenly bereft of his key staff advisers and a clutch of other important agents.

A former governor, Agnew has far more political savvy than he has been given an opportunity to demonstrate. He has been loyal. And it is in his own interest to help President Nixon out of this mess, since his prospects for the 1976 presidential nomination may depend upon public opinion of the Nixon Administration.

BUT THE PRESIDENT has not solicited his regular advice, although he has encouraged suggestions from lower - echelon White House staffers on diversionary or domestic actions that could be taken during this difficult period. The Vice President's isolation is primarily a product of Nixon's reluctance to share his great powers with anyone who might later be in a position to challenge him.

Nixon saw qualities in Agnew which he admired when he selected him twice as his running mate. But the two men were initially strangers and they never developed a mutual rapport which could break down the formality of their official relationship.