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Humphrey Scores Agnew

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 17—

Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey accused the Nixon Administration today of a concerted effort to suppress dissent in the United States—an effort that he said could “open a Pandora’s box of reaction, backlash and repression.”

Mr. Humphrey characterized Vice President Agnew’s attack on television commentators and similar remarks by other Administration officials as “an obvious and calculated appeal to our people’s lesser or baser instincts.”

Speaking between sessions of the first meeting of the Democratic Policy Council, which was organized two months ago to speak for the party on national issues, the former Vice President stopped short of a direct attack on Mr. Nixon. But he said that either the President was coordinating the assault on the media and on antiwar demonstrators “or it’s one of the

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most unusual coincidences within the memory of man.”

“When you have the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Cabinet officials, the Vice President and the National Committee of the Republican party all working the same line,” he asserted, “this isn’t as if the Vice President just had a lost weekend.”

The council, composed of 72 party leaders headed by Mr. Humphrey, later passed a resolution deploring “efforts to stifle criticism of Government officials by dissenting citizens and responsible newsmen.” The resolution said that speeches by Mr. Agnew; Dean Burch, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission; Herbert G. Klein, the Administration’s Director of Communications, and others “alarm those who believe in the right of dissent and in a free press.”

In a speech in Des Moines, Iowa, last Tuesday, the Vice President upbraided what he called the “small and unelected” elite of television commentators for remarks critical of President Nixon’s Nov. 3 Vietnam policy speech. Mr. Klein and Mr. Burch expanded on that theme, and other Administration spokesmen have attacked participants in this weekend’s antiwar demonstrations here.

“I believe the Nixon Administration is not really trying to bring us together,” said Mr. Humphrey, leading the Democratic counterattack by turning one of Mr. Nixon’s favorite slogans to his own use. “It is engaged, knowingly or unknowingly, in a polarization process.”

“I, for one, want to make it clear that I disagree with those who would create an atmosphere of suppression and call it patriotism,” Mr. Humphrey said.

At Mr. Humphrey’s side in a conference room at the Watergate Hotel was W. Averell Harriman, whose televised commentary on the President’s speech was singled out by Mr. Agnew for condemnation. Mr. Harriman has been selected as the chairman of the council’s committee on international affairs.

The 78-year-old diplomat joined in the rebuttal to Mr. Agnew’s remarks, commenting that they “smacked of a totalitarianism which I don’t like at all.”

Mr. Humphrey also spoke more harshly of President Nixon’s Vietnam policy than at any time since he said, after a visit to the White House on Oct. 10, that Mr. Nixon was “proceeding along the right path” in Vietnam.

This afternoon, he praised certain aspects of the President’s policy—including troop withdrawals, more restricted American offensive operations and plans for greater “Vietnamization” of the war—and again promised to refrain from partisanship.

But he also said that the Nixon policy’s “weakness” was the degree to which it depended upon the actions of the governments in Hanoi and Saigon. Mr. Nixon said in his policy statement that troop withdrawals depended in part on South Vietnamese ability to take over the burden of combat and North Vietnamese restraint on the battlefield.

“I want to make sure,” said Mr. Humphrey, “that we don’t leave American policy in the hands of a rather weak government in South Vietnam or an intemperate and stubborn government in North Vietnam. Otherwise we can be held there forever by either the pleas of the south or the sporadic attacks of the north.”

Mr. Humphrey added that he believed that only if troop withdrawals were both rapid and systematic would the President’s policy be successful. He repeatedly emphasized that American actions must be linked to “out national interests” and nothing else.

His comments were remarkably similar to those made after Mr. Nixon’s speech by foes of the war, including Representative Allard K. Lowenstein, Democrat of Nassau County, L.I.