

WXPost JUN 1 0 1973

Agnew Shuns Silence, Will Defend President

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Vice President Spiro T. Agnew has rejected the advice of some supporters that he preserve an "Agnew option" for the presidency by quietly disassociating himself from President Nixon on the Watergate scandal.

Instead of refusing to become the "point man" for the President—as Agnew has been urged to do by some of his conservative supporters—the Vice President Monday is to make a major speech defending Mr. Nixon and criticizing the conduct of the Senate committee that is investigating Watergate.

"The Vice President has every confidence in the President," said J. Marsh Thomson, Agnew's press secretary. "He is convinced that the courts are the proper place to try the defendants, not the committee room, and that there are all kinds of dangers from continued public hearings. He is increasingly distressed about it."

Thomson made his comment in response to questions about whether Agnew had decided to follow the counsel of those who want him to preserve his own presidential possibilities by keeping silent.

AGNEW, From A1

statement issued the day after Mr. Nixon's statement. Reportedly, Agnew acted at White House behest.

Now Agnew has decided to renew this strategy of presidential loyalty. One person close to the Vice President believes that "intense personal loyalty" is primarily responsible for Agnew's decision, but says that Agnew also is genuinely distressed by the "hearsay" of the Senate hearings.

"There are conservatives who believe in good conscience that he ought to steer clear of Watergate, but he isn't going to do so," Thomson said.

These conservatives realize that Agnew cannot use his position to openly criticize the President. But they are fearful that Agnew will defend the President on issues where defense is difficult and thus be-



VICE PRESIDENT AGNEW
... remains loyal

An article in the June 2 issue of Human Events, an ultra-conservative Washington publication, urged that Agnew model himself after Calvin Coolidge, who as Vice President remained silent as President Warren G. Harding became steadily implicated in the Teapot Dome scandal. This silence helped make Coolidge the popular choice of Republicans distressed by the scandal.

The article, which was

come publicly identified with Watergate.

"As the scandal has spread, men have fallen from power like felled trees," Human Events wrote. "This it would behoove the Vice President to stay clear of the volatile Watergate mess."

One factor that may have weighed in Agnew's decision to follow a loyalist course of action is the President's choice of Melvin R. Laird as his chief domestic adviser.

Laird said he had discussed his prospective appointment with Agnew. In a press conference immediately after he was named, Laird also warmly praised the Vice President and said that Agnew was in charge of the Domestic Council when the President couldn't preside.

This is a sore point with Agnew, who headed the Office of

headed "Agnew should beware of stain of Watergate," concluded:

"Agnew, in short, may be called upon to fill the shoes of 'Silent Cal.' But he won't be able to do so if the public perceives him as the defender of wrongdoing, precisely what the public may perceive if he is often out front, excusing the President's handling of Watergate."

Agnew's friends made the same argument personally to the Vice President, and there are some indications that he for a time considered a strategy of silence. He made no mention of Watergate in two speeches last week, and he also avoided the issue when he attended the National Governors Conference at Lake Tahoe, Nev.

In two weeks preceding the Human Events article, Agnew was outspoken in the President's defense. Particularly after Mr. Nixon's May 22 citation of "national security" as a defense for some domestic eavesdropping.

Agnew, who had praised the President's April 30 televised speech on Watergate as "courageous," also echoed the national security defense in a

See AGNEW, A8, Col. 4

Intergovernmental Relations for Mr. Nixon in his first term and was therefore his liaison with state and local governments.

But the Office of Intergovernmental Relations was abolished in the second term with the agreement of now-deposed presidential aides John Ehrlichman and H. R. Halde- man.

Kenneth Cole became staff director of the Domestic Council and has appeared to have taken over Agnew's old role.