

Agnew Tells of A Bribe Offer

Washington

Back in 1966 when he was "very inexperienced and quite uninformed about such matters," Vice President Spiro T. Agnew said yesterday, he was offered a bribe.

Agnew, under investigation by federal prosecutors in Baltimore on a variety of allegations, including bribery, told a press conference that the 1966 incident was the only time he was ever offered a bribe — and that he reported it.

The man to whom Agnew eventually reported the alleged bribe attempt, former Baltimore county State's attorney Frank H. Newell III, said yesterday that he thought Agnew's allegation was "baloney" in 1966 and told Agnew so at the time.

NOMINATION

The bribe allegation was made in August, 1966 when Agnew, the county executive of Baltimore county, was seeking the Republican nomination for governor in the September primary.

"He (Agnew) refused to tell me who had offered him the bribe," Newell recalled in a telephone interview.

"His explanation was that he didn't want a lot of innocent people to get hurt. I asked him how innocent could people be who went around offering him bribes."

Newell said that he came to the conclusion after talking to Agnew and his personal attorney, George W. White Jr., that Agnew's allegation was "a hoax, political tomfoolery." He said he told Agnew "either tell me who is involved or just keep your mouth shut during the rest of the campaign about this."

Agnew, he said, never mentioned the alleged bribe again during the campaign.

SLOTS

Agnew's disclosure, Jules Witcover reports in his book, "White Knight, the Rise of Spiro Agnew," followed a newspaper report that one of

the Democratic gubernatorial candidates, George P. Mahoney, had been offered a bribe by Maryland slot machine interests.

Mahoney, who went on to an upset win in the Democratic primary only to lose to Agnew in the general election, denied the report.

But Agnew followed up the report in an interview, saying he had been offered \$200,000 in campaign contributions by the slot machine interests as a bribe.

Under a 1963 law, slot machines were to be phased out by July 1968 in the four southern Maryland counties where the devices had been legal. Each year following the passage of that law, slot machine interests sought passage of legislation which would extend the life of the slots.

After Agnew made his allegation, Newell said, "I issued a statement saying that if he had information on bribery, he had a duty to report it to me."

REFUSED

He said Agnew later called him and set up the meeting at which Newell said Agnew refused to disclose who had approached him with alleged bribe offer. (Newell, a Democrat, served as state's attorney for more than ten years and was defeated for re-election in 1966).

In his press conference yesterday, Agnew apparently erroneously recalled that he was offered the bribe "many years ago, before I became county executive . . ." Asked if he reported it to authorities, Agnew responded:

"I did not at that time report it. I mentioned it and reported it later on. If you want to ask me why I didn't report it, I can only say that I was very inexperienced and quite uninformed about such matters at the time."

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