

# How Agnew Took on

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Los Angeles Times

Washington

Until it was revealed last week that Spiro Agnew was under investigation for purportedly accepting kickbacks from Maryland contractors, the Vice President had been steadily fading back into the household obscurity from which President Nixon had rescued him in 1968.

But Agnew's practice of playing second violin in the White House orchestra ended last week on an abrupt, discordant note. After a 1½ hour meeting with Mr. Nixon,

## Analysis and Opinion

described by White House sources as "acrimonious," Agnew emerged

firmly committed to an outspoken course of action that he knows may cast an unflattering light on President Nixon's policy of silence and half-statements about Watergate.

In the new atmosphere of independence, Agnew aides and supporters now tell a story of repeated humiliations by the White House: telephone calls that H. R. Haldeman never bothered to return, domestic decisions that Agnew was "frozen out of" by John Ehrlichman, carefully arranged White House news leaks that undercut Agnew while he was abroad.

Last year Agnew was subjected to the embarrassment

of what he considered well-launched trial balloons that John Connally would replace him as the Republican vice presidential nominee.

And in the post-election reorganization carried out by Haldeman and Ehrlichman on instructions from the President, the vice president's staff was trimmed 10 per cent and Agnew was stripped of his liaison role with state and local governments.

### ROLE

Agnew made no secret that the intergovernmental role was the one he enjoyed most, and he publicly hinted that he hoped for a new intergovernmental mission after Ehrlichman left the government on April 30.

"Quite candidly, the President hasn't defined my role yet," Agnew said in an early May interview with the Washington Post.

That "definition" never came. Instead, Domestic Council Director Kenneth G. Cole continued as intergovernmental liaison man.

Then, last week, in response to a criminal investigation that he feels could break his political career or make it, Agnew held a press conference. And his view of the relationship between the President and the vice president sounded like a personal declaration of independence.

### VIEW

"I think a vice president should stand on his own two feet," Agnew said.

From the reports filtering out of the White House in the aftermath of the historic and private Tuesday meeting between Mr. Nixon and Agnew, the President had plenty to say and not much of it was complimentary.

Agnew insists that he had warned the President months ago of "rumors" that he might be indicted on tax fraud, bribery and conspiracy charges.

Privately, according to some reports, Agnew also tried to sit down with Mr. Nixon to discuss these reports but was denied entry by Chief of Staff Alexander Haig.

This report is greeted skeptically by White House aides, who believe that the

President would have met with Agnew at any time if the message he received had been one of impending indictment.

### MEETING

In any case, it is known that the meeting was a heated one and that Agnew declared at the outset that he had decided to hold a press conference to affirm his innocence. Agnew was more determined than ever to speak out when he left the meeting.

Agnew staffers are particularly distressed by what they see as White House reluctance to give the vice president a full vote of confidence.

"The President did a lot more for Ehrlichman and

Haldeman than he did for Agnew," said one Agnew aide angrily. His reference was to Mr. Nixon's April 30 speech in which he described Haldeman and Ehrlichman as "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

Agnew has received no such endorsements — and in the process he has begun to lose his identity as the "President's man" and to acquire independent stature.

He will, of course, go down if the charges for which he is being investigated hold up in court. But if he is exonerated, he may enter the next political campaigns free of the mixed blessing of being the chosen candidate of a tainted President.