

# Spiro Agnew Meets the Press

**T**HE VICE PRESIDENT has succeeded where others have failed. He has embarrassed the President.

He did it by holding a press conference.

Agnew clearly one-upped the President, who has given the nation the silent treatment on Watergate since April, when he announced "major developments" and ducked out without taking a single query.

The fact that in time of crisis the Vice President flung himself on the mercy of the press corps was not without its irony. But the "shouting match" that White House officials claim would inevitably ensue should the President present himself to the pack did not materialize.



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**T**HE PRESIDENT brought this new awkwardness upon himself. He seems to have momentarily forgotten that Spiro Agnew was a politician before he became a Nixon team-player and retained the deep survival instincts necessary to a man who clawed his way through the hard school of Maryland office seekers.

For approximately 72 hours, Agnew must have looked like the light at the end of Nixon's Watergate tunnel. The disclosure that he was under criminal investigation certainly proved the President's central contention that "everybody does it." And since the Watergate hearings have taught us that anything is possible, the possibility of Agnew's resignation must have crossed the Presidential mind at some point in time.

And with that prospect came the hope of a resurgence of power. A President, however crippled, who can choose another vice president is a man with some political leverage.

For that brief period, Agnew was someone the President could look down on.

So the first White House response was "no comment." So was the second. Agnew had heard with everyone else how the White House treats friends in trouble. The third time the press went after Deputy White House Press Secretary Gerald Warren on the subject of presidential confidence they extorted from him a minimal acknowledgment.

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**T**HE VICE PRESIDENT heaped coals of fire on his principal, saying that he had "absolutely total confidence" in Nixon. The latter's private expression of faith was good enough for him, because he thinks "the Vice President should stand on his own feet."

He also took the candor cup by admitting that he spends most of his time on his present difficulties. The President always prefers to suggest that Watergate is a side issue, although he has 10 lawyers working on the case. He will not share them with Agnew, who has some lesser constitutional questions of his own, Warren said plainly, anxious to avoid the image of two men assisting each other's burdens in the mire.

The Vice President promptly diminished his big public relations coup, by dashing out to Palm Springs and a sojourn with his friend Frank Sinatra, but before he went, he had conveyed the impression that somebody in the White House, at least, has learned something from Watergate.

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