

Fighting At The Top

Agnew Friend Blames Nixon For the Leaks

By Morton Kondracke

WASHINGTON — (CST) — Vicious, Kremlin-like infighting is under way at the top of the administration, with friends of Vice President Agnew accusing President Nixon and Attorney General Elliot Richardson of conspiring to destroy the vice president.

The Agnew friends allege that by leaking anti-Agnew stories to the press through Richardson's Justice Department, President Nixon is trying to divert attention from the Watergate scandal and eliminate the possibility of his own impeachment.

Richardson is either inspiring the leaks or failing to plug them, an Agnew associate said, "because he wants to be President and he doesn't seem to care which body he steps over to do it."

'Phoney Mr. Clean'

The Agnew associate excoriated Richardson as a "Phoney Mr. Clean" guilty of the "Goddamn hypocrisy" of refusing to comment on Watergate and other administration scandals, "then commenting immediately that the President is on sound constitutional ground."

Though not in government service, the Agnew associate is in close touch with the vice president. He agreed to be interviewed on condition that he not be identified.

Richardson denied responsibility for leaks, especially to Time magazine, that Agnew was nearly certain to be indicted on charges of receiving payoffs from contractors. So has U.S. Attorney George Beall, who is heading the probe involving Agnew in Baltimore.

The White House has declined to issue a statement of full confidence in the vice president, and Agnew's associates pointed to this as evidence that Nixon is hostile to Agnew's interest.

"is too close to Nixon."

"I don't see anybody around to unify the party. The divisions would be too deep. What you are seeing going on now is internecine warfare that is very bitter."

Although Agnew is being investigated by an ostensibly conservative Republican in Maryland, Beall, Agnew associates said that "he's a Nixon appointee and he's from the same wing of the party as Richardson."

"In 1968, Gov. Agnew headed the Maryland delegation to the Republican National Convention and he understandably wished to cast a unanimous vote for Nixon.

Tandem

Asked if he thought Nixon and Richardson were operating in tandem in the Agnew case, the associate said:

"Absolutely. Agnew's problems serve the President's interests. They distract attention from Watergate. They make it practically impossible for Nixon to be impeached. You're not

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going to remove No. 1 if No. 2 is under a cloud.

"And, God forbid, if the vice president should be forced out, the President can say, 'We've spilled enough blood. Now let us unify and go on together.'"

The source predicted that if Agnew were driven from office — "skewered," he said — the Republican Party can probably forget about the 1976 election.

Sees Split

"It will split the party wide open. The conservatives will go into the convention for blood. They are not going to settle for any 'pragmatist.' That's what they went for in 1968.

"They won't accept a liberal," including Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.), he said, and former Treasury Secretary John B. Connally

that contractors are people who make contributions to political candidates and get contracts," the source said. "Can you find a state in which it doesn't happen? You could find it in John Connally's administration in Texas. They're looking at it in Illinois.

"The question is, are the things connected — did somebody tell the contractors they had to fork over, or that they would get contracts if they contributed?

"As to the charges that Agnew took money himself, I can't believe that he'd be that dumb. It doesn't add up. I saw where they said he'd taken money to put somebody in a GSA (General Service Administration) job. Why, you couldn't get anybody a job in the government if you're vice vice president. It just doesn't happen."

Immunity

Agnew's friend said he believed that witnesses against Agnew were inducted to make charges against the vice president by threats of prosecution and promises of immunity.

"They get these contractors in there and tell them, 'Look you're in serious trouble. You're going to go to jail if you don't cooperate. So jump aboard the boat real quick and you can get immunity. Otherwise, you'll get 20 or 30 years.

"This immunity statute was enacted in 1968 to get Mafia criminals. Now it's being used by political headhunters."

Agnew's friend said the vice president might survive and emerge stronger politically from his ordeal if he is not indicted. He said Agnew does not have to be indicted and acquitted in court to be cleared of suspicion.

"If he's not indicted, people will say, 'It was just a lot of talk. They went after him, but they couldn't prove anything, they couldn't back it up.'

"There was a time when, if he wasn't indicted, it would look as though there was a coverup. Now that's changed. If he doesn't get indicted, people will say, 'they didn't have the goods.'"

One Holdout

"The one member of the delegation who did not vote for Nixon was George Beall, who voted for (New York Gov. Nelson A.) Rockefeller.

"He's a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy and Princeton — what they call from 'old, old Maryland Republican aristocracy.'"

"You know what that means — it means that they don't take kindly to a Greek upstart coming in and taking over political power in the state. There's no alliance between the Bealls and Agnew, no matter how they try to imply that it is fair and square because Agnew is being investigated by a Republican conservative."

The Agnew associate made it clear that the cultural animosity extended also to Richardson. He repeatedly mimicked Richardson's Boston Brahmin accent and implied that the attorney general's upper-class origins contributed to the political differences involved in the Agnew affair.

Angry

Agnew's friend did not immediately declare that Agnew was innocent of the charges being leveled against him — rather, he was angry that they were being leaked.

"It's practically inevitable