

AGNEW ATTACKS U.S. JUSTICE AIDES ON INQUIRY LEAKS

Charges Effort 'to Indict Me
in the Press' While Grand
Jury Weighs the Case

A SECOND PUBLIC PLEA

Richardson Again Vows to
Discipline Any Culprits
—Beall Defends Staff

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 21 —

Vice President Agnew accused members of the Justice Department today of an effort "to indict me in the press" and called for an investigation to expose the Federal investigators responsible.

In an aggressive public statement that exposed an unusual level of distrust and division within the Administration, the

Text of Agnew's statement
appears on Page 24.

Vice President charged that there was a "clear and outrageous effort to influence the outcome of possible grand jury deliberations."

The Vice President called on Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson to begin an investigation and pursue it "wherever it may lead" to expose those who the Vice President said were leaking information to the press concerning possible bribery, extortion, fraud and conspiracy charges against himself.

Two hours later Mr. Richardson said he shared the Vice President's concern about "unfair and inaccurate publicity" but added there was no basis for the assumption that the information had come from law enforcement officials.

Vigorous Action Vowed

"Any plausible lead implicating the Department of Justice," Mr. Richardson said in a brief statement, "will be pursued vigorously and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against any department employe found to be responsible."

In Baltimore, United States Attorney George Beall denied that his prosecutors had been "in any way" the source of any news leaks.

In his second nationally televised meeting with the press in 10 days, the Vice President expressed "shock" at the steady leakage of information to the news media from the investigation by the United States Attorney's office in Baltimore.

The Vice President recalled that he was formally notified of the investigation early in August but had remained silent about it. He said he had commented on the matter only after learning that the news media were prepared to publish details of the investigation. He had, he said, "every reason to believe" that the Attorney General and Mr. Beall and their staffs would prevent publicity on the matter.

The leaks, Mr. Agnew said, began almost immediately and have "continued unabated." He continued:

"I regret to say that it has

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become clear that the 'sources close to the investigation' so frequently quoted were indeed just that—persons involved in the investigatory process ... I can only assume ... that some Justice Department officials have decided to indict me in the press whether or not the evidence supports their position. This is a clear and outrageous effort to influence the outcome of possible grand jury deliberation."

Apologizing at the beginning and the end of his seven-minute statement for declining to receive questions, the Vice President took extreme care to explain that he condemned not the news media for carrying the reports, but the persons who leaked the information.

Early in the first Nixon Administration, Mr. Agnew had been the chief spokesman against what he considered the shortcomings of the press.

"I cannot," he said today, "fault you for publishing information given you by informants within the Department of Justice."

Neither the Vice President nor his staff offered any explanation on why he chose to level such charges against others in the Nixon Administration rather than to work quietly, behind the scenes, to seal the leaks.

Time Magazine Article

"All I can tell you," one staff member said, "is that the Time magazine article crystallized the whole business of leaks from the Justice Department and he thought this sort of thing was serious enough that it ought to be called to the attention of the American people."

The Time magazine article published yesterday was mentioned by the Vice President in his brief statement, indicating that it led directly to his decision to challenge publicly the integrity of the Federal Government's investigation.

Under the title, "Headed Toward an Indictment?" the Time magazine article quoted unnamed Justice Department officials as saying that the evidence against Mr. Agnew—including alleged cash payoffs—was so strong that the department had no choice but to take the matter to trial.

"Despite all the Vice President's protestations of innocence, however," the article said, "Time has learned that in the view of Justice Department officials in Washington, the case against him is growing steadily stronger, and that

an indictment appears inevitable."

It could not be learned whether President Nixon had been notified in advance of the contents of Mr. Agnew's statement, but the White House was informed that the press had been called by Mr. Agnew to receive a statement.

Mr. Agnew appeared calm when he walked to the rostrum in the small theater near his office in the Executive Office Building. Coolly dressed in blue—suit, tie and shirt—against the backdrop of blue curtains, he faced the television cameras at 3 P.M. to proclaim his innocence quietly.

"As I said before," he read from the statement, "I have nothing to hide. I have made all requested records available to the prosecutors, and have offered to meet with them and answer any questions they may have."

He then assailed the United States Attorney's handling of the investigation.

"Mr. Beall says that he is not sure whether he even wishes to question me," Mr. Agnew said. "I suppose that, if he wants to hear only one side of the story, that is up to him. I will say only that it seems to me a very strange way to run an investigation."

Only last Sunday, Attorney

General Richardson appeared on national television and denied reports that information on the investigation had been leaked by his department. He promised to investigate any such suggestion and said any employe found to have leaked information would be punished.

Vow by Richardson

"I have communicated with the Attorney General today and have asked that he fulfill that promise," Mr. Agnew said, "and pursue such an investigation vigorously. I hope that the national news media will also urge Mr. Richardson and the Justice Department to conduct such an investigation diligently, wherever it may lead, and to use all available investigatory tools to compel sworn testimony to reveal the identity of 'unnamed Justice Department officials' and 'sources close to the investigation.'"

Mr. Agnew's challenge to Mr. Richardson came shortly after the Attorney General publicly assumed full responsibility for the ultimate decisions to be made in the Maryland investigation.

Mr. Richardson asserted Sunday, and United States Attorney Beall agrees, that he would make the final decision on whether information gathered by the Maryland investigation would be presented to a grand jury.

As Mr. Beall explained the situation today, the investigation is in what he calls "the Agnew phase" but no evidence that might involve the Vice President has been formally presented to the grand jury. None will be, he said, until "probably" after Labor Day.

"Richardson," Mr. Beall said, "has to make the decision of when and if such information is to be presented."

That decision, in turn, depends on another Mr. Richardson must make—whether a Vice President can be indicted before having been impeached by Congress.