

'Fight, Ted'

Warm Reception To Agnew Speech

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As Spiro Agnew walked into the Los Angeles Convention Center, a slightly overweight pom-pom girl led the Ohio delegation in a chant:

"Fight, Agnew, Fight!"

The lady, wearing a big red "A" on her white sweatshirt, was giving well-intentioned but, as it turned out, superfluous advice.

The vice president was in a fighting mood as he came to the podium Saturday and listened to the five-minute ovation given him by the more than 2700 delegates to the National Federation of Republican Women convention.

After reading his prepared remarks in a generally desultory fashion, Agnew geared up for the attack.

"In the past several months, I have been living in purgatory," he stated.

Then he showed that in the next several months he does not plan to live in limbo.

CAREER

This was the most important speech in Agnew's political career. He blasted the Justice Department, the media, and those "small and fearful men" who, he claimed implicated him in a payoff scandal unjustly to gain immunity.

As usual, Agnew's words, in print, read more dramatically than they seem when heard in person.

His delivery was, for the most part, somewhat calm. But that changed when he came to the high point.

He spoke in capital letters. One could almost see them, as he stared directly into the TV cameras (it was carried live on NBC) and said:

I WILL NOT RESIGN IF INDICTED! I WILL NOT RESIGN IF INDICTED!"

The hall turned into bedlam. The chant changed to "Fight, Ted, Fight!" The pom-pom lady jiggled to the front of the delegate area, waving the pom-poms so vigorously some pieces of them fell off.

FINISH

Agnew wanted to finish, however, and into the din — almost unheard by most of the people—he continued:

"Our Constitution says that every man is entitled to a fair trial and a presumption of innocence.

"I would forsake the principles of the Founding Fathers if I abandoned this fight."

What did it all mean?

It appears to mean that Agnew is determined not to abandon his hopes of suc-

ceeding President Nixon in 1976.

And the reaction of the GOP women to Agnew's flat statement: "I want to say at this point, clearly and unequivocally, I am innocent of the charges against me," was swift.

DEPARTED

Less than 45 minutes after Agnew departed, the convention unanimously passed an "Emergency Resolution" reading:

"... the delegates at this 17th biennial convention request their respective Congressmen to grant the request of Vice President Spiro Agnew for a hearing in the House of Representatives."

The federation has 500,000 members, and is not a political force to be taken lightly.

The fact that many delegates were wearing "Spiro for President Badges" and buying bumper stickers reading "Keep Our Veep" and "God Bless Spiro Agnew" certainly did not go unnoticed by operatives for other potential GOP presidential candidates.

California's Ronald Reagan and Texas' John Connally were up there in the front of the pack before 11 a.m. Saturday.

They haven't lost ground, but Agnew, a few days earlier considered almost out of the running by the self-anointed experts, is, as of Saturday, right back in there with them.

