

# Spiro Agnew's Personal 'Rock of Gibraltar'

By Vera Glaser and  
Malvina Stephenson

## Washington

The invisible man at Spiro Agnew's elbow is Arthur Sohmer, a tall, graying lawyer who serves as the vice president's chief of staff and personal confidant.

Sohmer is Agnew's buffer in the fierce, ongoing war with the White House.

As Agnew's legal troubles near the flash point and the vice president prepares a national tour to take his case to the country, the work load and toll on his staff's morale has mounted.

Sohmer, 47, is "the rock of Gibraltar who keeps us from falling apart," a colleague said.

Unlike such vice presidential aides as Peter Malatesta, who tosses gala parties in a \$300,000 mansion, and C. D. Ward, who cultivates his social image, Sohmer zeroes in utterly on his job.

He has managed to stay almost 100 per cent unknown to the public. One reporter, who called Mrs. Sohmer to check biographical facts, was told through the vice president's news secretary that Sohmer resented the "pressure."

"He's a mystery man," Agnew himself said, adding, "He's been with me ten years. I raised him from a pup."

Low-key, tough and often witty, Sohmer has protected and advised Agnew at the county, state and federal levels.

He earns his \$40,000 salary, working a 12-hour day, traveling with Agnew, passing out assignments, serving as a funnel through which aides report to the boss and keeping a firm hand on details.

He rides herd on a staff often engaged in guerilla combat with the White House. When a showdown is required, Sohmer prevails upon Agnew to appeal directly to Nixon.

Early on, when former presidential aide H. R. Haldeman was riding high, he made it known he wanted to see Agnew.

Haldeman was informed he could do so by walking across the street to the vice president's office.

When the Agnews were snubbed by omission from the guest lists of several White House state dinners, the social office was reminded that protocol requires the vice president's presence. They have since cooperated.

Sohmer met Agnew as a young Republican in Baltimore county.

While working as a traveling salesman for the Union Camp Corporation, Sohmer ran Agnew's campaign for county executive.

In 1966, he resigned his job to spend full time managing Agnew's gubernatorial race.

More recently, Sohmer was at Agnew's side during his spirited news conference concerning the probe of al-

leged bribery and kickbacks. Immediately afterward they flew together to singer Frank Sinatra's Palm Springs hideaway.

Sohmer's name surfaced in the press for almost the first time recently, when he reportedly influenced the awarding of a government contract to an urban planning firm, which claimed it was later solicited for campaign money for Agnew.

Sohmer is methodical, insisting that everyone carry pad and pencil into meetings with Agnew. But he apparently leavens the grind with humor.

"He's Jewish and loves to joke about it if he knows you well," said a GOP politician who has worked with Sohmer over the years.