

OTHER VOICES/ Comment on current issues from various contributors

Why I have no sympathy for him

MIKE ROYKO

Early last year I received a phone call from Spiro Agnew's press secretary.

He said the Vice President was upset about something I had written and wanted to talk to me about it.

The column in question had been about a speech Agnew had given in Chicago. In the speech, he made crude, cheap remarks about people on welfare.

As his press secretary put it, I had "peeled his hide off" with my column.

We set up a date and a couple of weeks later Agnew and I sat down in his suite in a Chicago hotel and talked for about 45 minutes.

He took his usual tough approach. Boiled down it came to this: There is too much cheating on welfare and I didn't know what the hell I was writing about.

When he finished, I said:

"For a man in your position, the Vice President of the United States, to keep carping about the poorest people in America, makes you a bully.

"I would have some respect for you if once — just once — you would make the same kind of speech about the big fat cats who cheat on their income taxes."

I expected to draw some kind of response, even an angry one. But he said nothing. He just looked at me for a moment, then shrugged and changed the subject.

I mention that conversation today because Agnew just pleaded no contest — in effect, guilty — to cheating on his income tax.

I have no way of knowing if his lack of response during our conversation had anything to do with the guilty knowledge already locked in his brain — and his tax records.

But I'd like to think he did. I'd like to think that at that moment he might have recognized what a hypocrite he was.

And that's why I have no sympathy for him, although in two long conversations I found him to be a likable person.

I might have felt some sympathy if he had failed to pay taxes on money he had worked hard to earn.

That's what he liked to preach about — that people should support themselves through good, honest work.

But the money amounted to graft, kickbacks out of the hands of contractors when he was governor of Maryland.

If he sweated for that kind of money, it wasn't from honest labor, but from nervousness that he might get caught. It was money he did nothing to earn, except by abusing a position of trust and power.

Yet, he could stand up in public and sneer at women who might hide the fact that they make a few bucks a month baby sitting, because they are afraid their welfare payments would be reduced.

He could sneer at people who bend the rules set up by bureaucrats because they are trying to get their families through another day, another meal, while living at the bottom of every social and economic ladder we have in this country.

He could sneer at people who "cheat," to use his word, because they are trying to survive.

To survive. Not to play golf with Frank Sinatra at a millionaire's resort in Palm Springs, or to build a palatial home, or to buy elegantly tailored suits and alligator golf bags. But merely to survive.

He could sneer at them while stuffing

his pockets like a Chicago alderman, and then go one step further and cheat the government out of its lawful share of his graft.

And he could sneer at them for the cynical purpose of playing upon the country's worst prejudices for political reasons.

So I can't feel any more compassion for him than he showed for the people who have never had the chance, as he did, to live the good life.

I hope that Agnew doesn't try to blame his downfall on the press.

No reporters told him to take money from contractors.

For the year January 1-December 31, 1972, or other taxable year beginning 1972, ending 1972, ending 19

Please print or type

First name and initial (If joint return, use first names and middle initials of both) _____ Last name _____ Your social security number (Husband's, if joint return) _____

Present home address (Number and street, including apartment number, or rural route) _____ Wife's number, if joint return _____

City, town or post office, State and ZIP code _____ Occupation _____ Yours _____ Wife's _____

Please attach Copy B of Form W-2 here

Filing Status—check only one:

1 Single

2 Married filing joint return (even if only one had income)

3 Married filing separately. If wife (husband) is also filing give her (his) social security number and first name here.

4 Unmarried Head of Household

5 Widow(er) with dependent child (Enter year of death of husband (wife) ▶ 19 _____)

Exemptions

6 Yourself Regular / 65 or over / Blind Enter number of boxes checked

7 Wife (husband)

8 First names of your dependent children who lived with you _____

Income

11 Wages, salaries, tips, and other earnings \$ _____

12a Dividends (see pages 6 and 13 of instr.) \$ _____

(If gross dividends and other dividends)

13 Interest income. [If \$200 or more, attach Form 1099-INT. If over \$200, attach Form 1099-INT.] _____

14 Income other than wages, dividends, interest, and royalties \$ _____

15 Total (add lines 11, 12a, 13, and 14) \$ _____

16 Adjustments to income (such as IRA contributions, student loan interest, etc.) \$ _____

17 Subtract line 16 from line 15 \$ _____

Caution: If you have unearned income and are being claimed as a dependent on your parents, you must file Form 1040. See boxed instruction on page 7, under "Tax-Credits-Payments." Check this box if you are a dependent on your parents. If you are not a dependent on your parents, do not check this box. If you check this box, you must attach Form 1040. See boxed instruction on page 7, under "Tax-Credits-Payments." Check this box if you are a dependent on your parents. If you are not a dependent on your parents, do not check this box. If you check this box, you must attach Form 1040.

Tax, Payments and Credits

18 Tax, check if from: Tax on income Schedule E tax

19 Total credits (from line 61) \$ _____

20 Income tax (subtract line 19 from line 17) \$ _____

21 Other taxes (from line 67) \$ _____

22 Total (add lines 20 and 21) \$ _____

23 Total Federal income tax with credits (subtract line 19 from line 22) \$ _____ or W-2P to front) \$ _____

24 1972 Estimated tax payments (including 1971 payments as credit from 1971 return) \$ _____

25 Amount paid with Form 4868, Application for Extension of Time to File U.S. Individual Income Tax Return \$ _____

26 Other payments (from line 71) \$ _____

27 Total (add lines 23, 24, 25, and 26) \$ _____

Bal. Due or Refund

28 If line 22 is larger than line 27, enter balance due \$ _____

29 If line 27 is larger than line 22, enter amount of refund \$ _____

30 Line 29 to be REFUNDED TO YOU \$ _____

31 Line 29 to be credited on 1973 estimated tax \$ _____

Foreign Accounts

Did you, at any time during the taxable year, have a bank, securities, or other financial account, or a military banking facility operated by a U.S. financial institution, in a foreign country? If "Yes," attach Form 4683. (For definitions, see instructions.)

Note: Be sure to complete Revenue Sharing (list on page 7).

Sign here

Under penalties of perjury, I declare that I have examined this return, and it is true, correct, and complete. Declaration of preparer (other than taxpayer) is based on preparer's knowledge of the information supplied by the taxpayer.

Your signature _____

Wife's (husband's) signature (if joint return) _____

No reporters told him to cheat on his income tax.

The advice he got from the press is basically the same that the press has given to politicians since the days when type was first set by hand in this country.

And the advice is simple enough: Play it honest and remember that you are working for the people.

If he had taken that advice, he'd be teeing off without a worry on his mind.