

After the Agnew Resignation

To the Editor:

The only shock concerning the resignation of Vice President Agnew is that he is not in jail.

The newspapers are filled with expressions of sympathy that in this dirty business called politics, where bribery and kickbacks are a way of life, Mr. Agnew has been singled out as a scapegoat. Rather than being a scapegoat, Mr. Agnew has been singled out for unbelievable, reproachable leniency.

The former Mayor of Newark, Hugh J. Addonizio, was convicted and sentenced to ten years in jail for similar kickback arrangements with public contractors. Observing the Agnew sentence, Mr. Addonizio can merely feel (1) that his only mistake was in not going high enough in government so as to earn immunity from incarceration, and (2) that in the United States, in the 1970's, Italian-Americans are still expendable.

One moral basis for incarcerating criminals is that people who voluntarily choose to commit a crime should be punished for that "wrong" exercise of freedom of choice. In many cases, particularly in the case of my clients, that freedom of choice is only a myth. Many persons are serving long jail sentences for striking out at their victims while in an uncontrollable rage or driven by years of unemployment and hunger.

Governor Rockefeller would put narcotics addicts in jail for life if, while addicted, they "choose" to sell the drug that they were using. Vice President Agnew was neither in a rage nor starving nor addicted to heroin when he accepted payoff after payoff as late as 1972, while Vice President of the United States, touring the country making morally indignant law-and-order pronouncements concerning domestic wrongdoers. He is a white-collar criminal whose only compulsion is greed and whose background provided him with more "freedom of choice" than 90 per cent of



the people currently serving long jail sentences.

Mr. Agnew was given a noncustodial sentence because Elliot Richardson asked for clemency. President Nixon's Attorney General preferred that no indictment be returned, that Mr. Agnew should resign, therefore avoiding impeachment by the House of Representatives.

Isn't it fair to assume that Richard Nixon has a very strong interest in making sure that the House of Representatives not utilize its rusty impeachment machinery? Avoiding a constitutional challenge which would certainly have resulted in indictment

and impeachment of Mr. Agnew more than explains Mr. Richardson's cynical plea for clemency.

George McGovern chose as his Vice President a man whose only crime was that he sought and received therapy in order to overcome emotional difficulties. For this George McGovern was massacred. Richard Nixon chose a common thief for Vice President and was elected to the highest public office of the United States.

Draw your own conclusions.

ROGER A. LOWENSTEIN
Newark, Oct. 11, 1973

The writer is Federal Public Defender for the District of New Jersey.

To the Editor:

The state of justice in the United States is truly amazing. The wheels of justice grind in an efficient manner in cases of income-tax evasion and kickbacks for the Vice President. But on the other hand, they grind very slowly in small, inconsequential matters, such as the crimes associated with Watergate, income-tax evasion for the President and other "small" crimes such as trying to circumvent the political system in the United States.

The President and the Republican party, the Justice Department and the entire Government have offered up a human sacrifice to deflect the real issues. The witch-hunters of Salem can't hold a candle to today's righteous accusers.

GEORGETTE HAUSER
Paterson, N. J., Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

The resignation of Vice President Agnew did not come as the result of the prosecutor's warning referred to in your Oct. 11 editorial. It resulted from the most disgraceful misuse of liberal press power ever seen in the history of the United States.

Mr. Agnew was elected by a tremendous majority of the American people who voted in 1972. Instead of being found guilty based upon a preponderance of the evidence, he was judged on the basis of newspaper smears in the form of unidentified "observers," unconfirmed reports and convenient leaks of supposedly confidential information.

Instead of being judged in a court of law, Mr. Agnew was judged guilty by a liberal triumvirate of two newspapers and an egotistical columnist known best as a master of character assassination. Although others will claim some of the credit, Spiro Agnew was essentially tried and convicted on the pages of The Times and The Washington Post as well as in the columns of Jack Anderson.

The injustice done Mr. Agnew is the most sickening example of the journalistic hysteria that surrounds the so-called freedom of the press — a newspaper's financial interest often ludicrously referred to as "the public's right to know."

WALTER AUDUBON
Bellerose, N. Y., Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

It was with a sense of incredulity that I read Anthony Lewis' Oct. 11 column, in which he states that Vice President Agnew's resignation "carries a profoundly important reassurance"; that is, that the courts did their duty by Spiro Agnew and thereby showed that the country was not without its institutions of honor.

The contrary is true. Spiro Agnew pleaded guilty to a felony charge. There is evidence that he was involved in other felonies. He will serve no time in prison and was fined far less than the profit he made from his criminal activity. His sentence to three years' probation again emphasizes how white-collar crime — even serious crime — is condoned by the courts.

I have a friend who is serving a seven-year sentence in prison after being convicted of committing a robbery of \$2. No force was used. My friend is poor. He is also black. He and thousands like him in the prisons across our country join me in a sense of outrage at this dual system of justice.

Our only reassurance is that nothing has changed in America.

SUSAN A. URBAN
Bronx, Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

I believe that by not straining the quality of mercy the ends of justice were wisely served in the Vice President's case.

I would hope that the Administration might extend the same logic to the question of amnesty. The reasons for leniency seem much the same in both cases: magnitude of the penalty of loss of office (read: "country" for the war exiles), permanent scars on the nation if prosecution continued, compassion as more in the public interest, etc.

Mr. Agnew used to speak of the double standard of the national media. An amnesty now might help to prove that the Administration itself does not have a double standard of justice.

(Rev.) ROBERT NEWTON BARGER
Champaign, Ill., Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

Unions pay their presidents salaries amounting to several hundred thousand dollars a year. This money must come from the people, who are variously called the working man, the taxpayer or the public.

Corporations pay their executives salaries plus stock options, which may amount to half a million dollars a year. Where does this money come from?

Other organizations pay lawyers large salaries to find tax loopholes so that they pay only nominal taxes or none at all.

States pay their Governors salaries in the neighborhood of \$35,000, which, in some instances, are supplemented by kickbacks from contractors and others who do business with the state.

Which system is the worst?

JOHN F. KENNEY
Brandon, Vt., Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

The President's acceptance letter to Spiro Agnew strikes me as pure hypocrisy. How can he cite "patriotism" and "dedication to the welfare of the nation" when this man has indeed cheated his country? The only patriotic thing Agnew did do was resign.

VERA EGNUSS
White Plains, Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

Gerald Ford may be the best or the worst nominee for Vice President. However, the networks' coverage and the instant acclaim that he received by the President's invited guests appeared to be based mainly on Mr. Ford's personal biography, his ability "to get along" with Congress and his loyalty to the President.

As a concerned citizen I was appalled at the meager emphasis given by the networks to the positions that



Mr. Ford has taken on the various issues that have faced and still are facing this nation.

After the fall of Agnew, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Dean and others, all Nixon appointees, caution and careful consideration of this nominee should be the tone of Congress and the people. How much more backslapping and political hay rides can this nation stand and continue to survive?

Congress, in its approval or disapproval of Mr. Ford, should reflect the sentiments of an electorate that has been objectively informed of Mr. Ford's past and present positions on political issues, [Editorial Oct. 13.]

EDWARD M. BARNETT

Potomac, Md., Oct. 12, 1973

To the Editor:

No sensitive person can rejoice at Spiro Agnew's personal fate, but its symbolic meaning for the nation is a cause of great gladness.

Agnew stood for obscurantism, intolerance and special privileges; he was the most eloquent spokesman for those whose narrow vision saw only the angry protests at home instead of the much more violent and needless destruction abroad, and he did more than any other man to destroy the spirit of open expression in the search for truth in the agonizing decade of the Vietnamese war.

He made millions suspicious of educators and students who sought little more than to awaken a decent conscience in our people. He influenced, by opposing the radical activists rather than understanding them, a wide-

ranging decline in funds, students and standards in both higher and secondary education. Thousands of potential benefactors and legislators turned their backs on learning because Spiro Agnew made them fear that revolution might be involved in it — never bothering to recall that American principles are rooted in responsible revolution.

Yes, if anything can appropriately symbolize the end of the age of Agnew, it will be a renewal of our faith in knowledge and in the people and institutions that seek it out and share it with the public. This includes the news media as well as the schools and universities; all who deal in facts and truth have had a painful burden removed.

JOHN E. CHAPPELL JR.
Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 11, 1973

To the Editor:

The most striking aspect of Spiro Agnew's fall from grace is his utter lack of repentance and his almost pathological refusal to admit the slightest possibility of wrongdoing.

After his conviction of income-tax evasion, he emerged from the court arrogant, imperious, proclaiming his innocence, to be wafted off in his chauffeured limousine.

Certainly, his attitude has been influenced by the clearly preferential treatment he received from those who are supposed to administer our criminal-justice system. How many of us, pleading guilty to deliberate income-tax evasion, would be let off by a kindly judge with a fine not even equal to the unpaid tax and a period of probation without supervision? I wonder, if I were to rob a bank, would a friendly district attorney be willing to drop all charges against me if I would just agree to quit my job?

Attorney General Elliot Richardson should be impeached and removed from his office if he persists in his decision to ignore the substantive evidence compiled by his own staff of possible bribery and extortion by Mr. Agnew.

Spiro Agnew is entitled to the same presumption of innocence until proven guilty as any other American citizen. He is not, however, entitled to get off scot-free without a trial in the face of compelling evidence of criminal activity.

Unless the Justice Department reverses its decision to drop all action on the Agnew case, it will give substance to the belief of a growing number of Americans that we no longer have a Government of evenhanded justice for all; what we have now is a double-standard system: law and order for working people and privilege and permissiveness for the wealthy and politically influential.

DANIEL F. HALLORAN
Albany, Oct. 11, 1973