

There was a notable lack of edge to former Vice President Agnew's remarks on television Monday night. It seemed as though every point he sought to make had been wrapped in cotton batting—muted, dulled. Very possibly Mr. Agnew had simply undertaken to do what could not be done, namely, to assert his absolute innocence while staying within the bounds of the negotiated agreement worked out between himself and the Department of Justice. Thus Mr. Agnew elaborated upon, but did not much add to, the essential elements of the position he took in court and shortly thereafter last Wednesday. By this account, the former Vice President resigned his office because it was in the interests of national tranquility that he do so, and he declined a court test of the government's charges against him because it was plain to him that he could not get a fair trial.

We found Mr. Agnew's televised elaboration of all this no more persuasive or plausible than his original statements. And, despite the more-in-sorrow tone in which he spoke, we found some of his remarks profoundly inept and others downright offensive. Mr. Agnew has betrayed the trust of millions of people who took him at his word over the years, and he has tarnished the high office he held. By what tortured logic can he now characterize the final consequences of these acts as the "suffering

and sacrifice that I have had to undergo?" Mr. Agnew "sacrificed" nothing, if the concept of sacrifice is to retain any meaning at all. He did something quite different: he made a deal with the prosecutors. By the same token, Mr. Agnew "had to undergo" nothing—or at least nothing for which he was not himself directly responsible. He was not compelled to his ordeal by some irrational fate or force, but rather by his own acts.

The former Vice President, of course, doesn't profess to see it that way, continuing to describe himself as a victim of media assault and prosecutorial malice and the craven instincts of witnesses seeking to save themselves at his expense. And yet there were so many elisions and contradictions and partial concessions in his speech that one could only be reinforced in the view that the case he was presenting to the public was constrained by circumstances unknown to the rest of us and somehow conditioned by his agreement with the government. Mr. Agnew badly bollixed up the actual impact of our immunity laws, he drew a curious distinction between the President and the President's agents at the Department of Justice . . . but why go on? It was a grim occasion and an unrewarding performance. There is very little else to say.