

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Former Vice President Agnew may have spared the country the agony of a long trial and all the presumed political uncertainty that might have followed; however, even impartial observers must admit that he swung a pretty good deal for himself. If only a small percentage of the alleged kickbacks to Agnew are true, the \$10,000 fine levied against him represents a small punishment for someone who has betrayed public confidence while making a nice profit for himself.

The country may well be much better off without Mr. Agnew as its Vice President, but think how much better off Mr. Agnew is because of our inept judicial system.

The recent increases in grants of immunity and plea bargaining are cheapening the American judicial system. If prosecutors and defense attorneys are too lazy to perform their jobs then who can blame certain citizens for taking a chance on criminal activities when they can be reasonably certain that reduced sentences await them if they are caught?

BERNARD H. ROSS,

Associate Professor of Government,
The American University.

Washington.

Perhaps the real significance of Agnew's resignation escapes most of us right now. May I, however, draw attention to the leniency our system shows to him because of his high office, his individual suffering and damaged reputation. Yes, as human beings, we should lean toward understanding and forgiveness to another human being.

But still within my own mind is a thought of the many cries for law and order that came from this same man. I think of the many attempts to disgrace those within our country who have in the past passionately sought to appeal for greater justice and peace in a system that seemed so oblivious to those principles. The poor, the idealistic young, the war resister, the civil rights leaders—if in their quest for a more compassionate and equal society, they broke into the established "nonequal order"—they were condemned and often imprisoned in our administration's appeals for more "law and order."

We still have no justice or understanding for the resister who is still serving a jail sentence or who fled the country rather than comply with a war deemed immoral and self-righteous. Yet we hear no appeal to conscience in the past 24 hours. For there can be none now. The only sound is one of a top-

pling fortress of a leader who can only face the evident truth by calling it a "damned lie."

We should be shamed in the presence of those to whom we have preached so fervently about freedom and justice and continue, in spite of our collective hurt—our damaged image—to try to ensure that in America justice and freedom is for everyone.

WAYNE E. CAMPBELL,

Falls Church.

It's incredible! The only man among the people at the top of this government whom I trusted to be honest and forthright, even though his stated political philosophies thoroughly clash with my political ideology, admittedly is guilty of at least one count of tax evasion, if nothing more. Recent denials of alleged wrongdoings notwithstanding, Mr. Agnew, the controversial speaker for the man in the White House, has become inoperative.

CARLA A. CHADER,

Bethesda.

The Attorney General of the United States, at the time of the sentencing of the former Vice President, pleaded with the court for compassion. The media analyses of Mr. Agnew's resignation and the subsequent courtroom drama were replete with expressions of compassion for the man. Such calls for sympathy from Mr. Agnew's arch-enemies provide a striking contrast to Mr. Agnew's hard-edged rhetoric of the past, advocating the compassionless treatment of those accused or convicted of crime or who are otherwise in conflict with the present administration. Ironically, Mr. Agnew's own criminality may work to neutralize those past vitriolic cries for a merciless approach to what he considers criminal activity.

L. GRAEME BELL II.

Washington.

I listened to the flurry of reports about the resignation of Vice President Agnew. Then I listened to the comments of Walter Cronkite and others to the effect that this was a time of national tragedy. I do not agree.



There is a great deal of tragedy surrounding Mr. Agnew, but it did not occur with Mr. Agnew's resignation. The tragedy occurred every time that Mr. Agnew spoke out in the name of law and order, while privately pocketing money he had not reported as taxable income. The tragedy occurred when Agnew twice ran for the highest office in the nation next to the presidency itself, while secretly pocketing money he had paid no taxes on. The tragedy occurred when Mr. Agnew demeaned the American citizens and voters in thinking that citizens would never discover his crimes. The tragedy continues because men like Richard Nixon argue that Mr. Agnew should be treated with understanding, despite the fact that Agnew willfully and cynically betrayed the people's trust time after time. The tragedy continues because Agnew is a free man today, while those opposed to the draft and Vietnam war are imprisoned and denied the right to return to their homeland; while people convicted of possessing a single joint of marijuana are serving years in prison; while people convicted of the crime of praying in the White House are jailed at the same time that the Vice President of yesterday is freed on unsupervised probation.

Mr. Agnew should be in prison because he has for so long and so often criminally and cynically betrayed the public's trust. Mr. Agnew should be in prison to serve as a warning to every other elected official that the use of their offices for their personal enrichment at the expense of the people who elected them will no longer be tolerated as common political conduct. The real tragedy is that Spiro Agnew is free.

JAMES W. HIMES.

Wheaton.

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Now that we are, for at least a short while, Vice Presidentless, people will be debating the merits and the demerits of Spiro Agnew. The charges which led to his resignation will provide grist for the mills of his enemies who now have proof that Agnew is not only an incompetent, but a crook as well. His friends will be forever convinced that he is guilty only of having attempted to survive in political life and was brought down by the same journalistic and legal establishment he had so justly attacked as Vice President. Many will be sympathetic, for as it became apparent that he was a polit-

President Agnew

ical liability the desertion of his colleagues was exposed for all to see.

We need not ponder too long or hard whether Agnew was—it is difficult not to speak of him in the past tense—a tragic hero or a Machiavellian villain. Quite plainly, he was neither. But he is a man who preached to us in lofty language about the values we, as Americans, should pursue. And, in the name of those values, he did an effective job of inflaming passions and spreading wider the rifts in our nation by branding both idealistic youth and an inquiring press “unpatriotic.” Now we know that his own record is tainted by political corruption, a practice which cannot be condoned even if it is not uncommon.

So even if we do have a bit of sympathy for Spiro Agnew, let us not cease to believe that it is our right and responsibility to subject men in high places to the closest scrutiny. The failure to do that would truly be unpatriotic. If we elect people and let them preach to us, we should at least know what they practice.

JEFF SQUIRES.

Washington.

In my view, our President should not be allowed to choose a new Vice President. That is, the Congress should reject every man nominated by the President. No person who is in the shadow of serious accusations of bribery of a federal judge, subornation of perjury, obstruction of justice, misprision of felony and other “high crimes and misdemeanors” should have the power to select that man first in line to succeed the President of the United States.

WYTHE W. HOLT JR.,
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

The necessity of a nomination for the office of Vice President arose from national as well as personal tragedy. In a spirit of decorum, could not the President have sent a message to the Congress rather than playing a guessing game for a TV audience?

The festive atmosphere, the music and the procession were more in keeping with the introduction of another queen for Henry VIII or of the winner of a million dollar lottery than with the requirements of this occasion. The performance was an insult to the democratic process and to the public which has had enough of the Watergate capers and San Clemente. Should we not have been offered restraint, respect and dignity rather than another circus?

A message to Congress would have

been more in keeping with the exigencies of the occasion, with the critical nature of the constitutional requirements and with the unfolded tragedy itself.

PAUL H. BANNER.

Washington.

President Nixon is to be commended for selecting Gerald Ford as his nominee for Vice President. However, the light-hearted atmosphere and frivolous manner in which he made this historical announcement was inexcusable.

Under the circumstances — under any circumstances — good taste would have dictated that an announcement of such importance would have been made in a more formal setting than the gaiety of a party and in a more formal tone than that of a comedian hosting a TV show.

PATRICIA E. CARR.

Falls Church.

I think we have all learned something from the example of former Vice President Agnew's intensive moralizing. I am reminded of a remark by the late Gene Talmadge, governor of Georgia and father of the present senator from that state. He was a tobacco-chewing, cussing, whiskey-liking man who often said: “When a fellow goes around telling you how honest he is, watch out!”

PAT MUNROE.

Washington.

The expressions of sympathy and compassion for Spiro Agnew from the President, members of Congress and others in public office are profoundly alarming.

The former Vice President is a confessed criminal. Chances are he is guilty of crimes far more serious than that to which he confessed. He is fortunate to have worked out a deal with the prosecutors in which he avoids prison and has to pay back only a fraction of the funds that were probably criminally obtained. Most men caught in similar circumstances would be imprisoned for several years.

At a time when the nation is desperate for moral leadership, one wishes from our public officials expressions of good riddance from high office of such a corrupt individual. But all we are given is further evidence of the decay of the American ideals of fairness and justice.

WARREN LASKO.

Chevy Chase.