

Conservative

Agnew

By Loye Miller Jr.
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WASHINGTON — Among those who loved Spiro Agnew best — the heavy weights of American conservatism — his name is now mud.

In the week since Agnew rocked the nation by resigning the vice presidency and accepting conviction for a felony, the reaction from the American Right has been almost uniformly a sorrowful cry of disillusionment with its former hero.

Many of the large figures who backed Agnew most staunchly over the past five years still feel that he was ill-treated procedurally by the White House or the Justice Department, or both.

But in the nation's capital, at least, no one of stature has stood up to profess belief in Agnew's claim that somehow he is really innocent.

At the same time, some of the most influential voices of the right have expressed acceptance of Agnew's guilt, and their own resulting sense of betrayal.

James Kilpatrick, one of America's most articulate advocates of conservatism, wrote:

"I liked and admired this man; I believed in him in print and on the hustings. I have defended Spiro Agnew a thousand times these past five years. . . I looked warmly toward his bid to the Republican nomination in 1976. On this cold gray morning in Washington, the disillusion is total."

The year's most famous conservative pundit, William

Buckley, has written an unabashed eulogy of the former vice president, judged simply "right" though Agnew had protested his innocence. "The evidence against him was overwhelming."

Columnist William Buckley wrote cryptically that "for Agnew the income tax chiseler I feel nothing more than the pity I feel for the pickpocket."

But like Kilpatrick and Human Events, Buckley was particularly outraged at being led on by Agnew's protestations of innocence.

"My beef against Agnew is that he stood before the women in California as recently as a fortnight ago and swore to them that he is innocent. That is hard to explain, very hard," Buckley wrote.

"The summary relates a tale of political shakedown and payoffs so brazen that in its totality it is unmatched for rawness by Teapot Dome, Credit Mobilier and Watergate," wrote Wilson.

Touching on this same theme, Kilpatrick mused: "What went through Agnew's mind, one wonders, when his friendly visitor came with the envelope (of illicit cash) in the morning, and he made a speech that night on the old values: honesty, integrity, obedience to the law."

In conclusion, Kilpatrick lamented: "He himself has stained this administration, shattered his believing friends, and dealt one more blow to the crippled President who raised him from obscurity. Don't bother Ted to say it all, an . . ."