

WXPost

Agnew Tried to Influence Witnesses, Prosecutor Says

NOV 2 1973

By Richard M. Cohen
Washington Post Staff Writer

Former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who said in August that he never tried to interfere in the investigation that led to his resignation, tried to influence the testimony of key witnesses against him, the U.S. attorney for Maryland said yesterday.

George Beall, who directed the investigation of political corruption, said that these attempts by Agnew formed "the heart" of what the government thought might amount to an obstruction of justice charge against the former vice president.

The alleged attempts were not included in the Justice Department's 40-page exposition of evidence the government released Oct. 10—the day Agnew resigned—because, Beall said, the prosecutors concluded they lacked sufficient proof. Agnew pleaded no contest to a single charge of tax evasion

and resigned as a result of a plea bargain with the Justice Department and the federal prosecutors in Maryland.

Beall said another element in the potential obstruction of justice charge was at least two discussions Agnew had with then-U.S. Attorney General Richard Kleindienst last February in which Agnew complained that the probe was politically motivated and designed to embarrass him. Beall said on Wednesday that Kleindienst made no effort to either alter or abort the investigation, which at that time dealt solely with political corruption in Baltimore County.

Beall refused yesterday to say how Agnew tried to influence witnesses other than to reveal that the former vice president used an intermediary. Other sources, however, said that Beall was referring to attempts by I. H. (Bud) Hammerman to discourage both Lester Matz and Jerome Wolff from cooperating with the federal investigation.

Eventually, all three—Hammerman, Matz and Wolff—cooperated with Baltimore prosecutors. They testified that they had participated with Agnew in a bribery and extortion scheme involving case payoffs from engineering firms doing business with the state when Agnew was gov-

ernor of Maryland from 1966 to 1969.

Hammerman, a Baltimore businessman whom the government alleged was a middleman in the bribery scheme, reportedly told the prosecutors that Agnew had asked him to talk to both Wolff and Matz in an attempt to keep them from cooperating with the government, sources said.

Along with Hammerman, Wolff, Agnew's former chairman of the Maryland State Roads Commission, and Matz, a partner in a Baltimore County engineering firm, supplied the bulk of the evidence against Agnew.

Hammerman has agreed to plead guilty to a tax charge that could lead to a three-year prison term and a \$10,000 fine. Matz and Wolff were given limited immunity and told that their testimony to the grand jury would not be used against them.

Beall on Wednesday made no reference to Hammerman's attempts to influence Matz and Wolff when he said that the government had considered bringing obstruction of justice charges against Agnew had the former Vice President been indicted. Beall referred only to Agnew's conversations with Kleindienst.

Beall said that one reason consideration of obstruction charges were dropped was that his staff was not in agreement on whether Agnew's conversations with Kleindienst constituted an attempt to block the investigation.