

Agnew's Arab Connection

By Maxine Cheshire

Former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who has friends interested in doing business in the Middle East, requested and received a private meeting here in December with Saudi Arabian Petroleum Minister Zaki Yamani.

Yamani confirmed this week in Tokyo that Agnew, who resigned as Vice President in October, had asked for an audience while the sheikh was here for conferences on the Arab oil embargo with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and other top Nixon administration officials.

Yamani said Agnew visited him at the Madison Hotel and indicated that the call was simply to get acquainted. Agnew told him he planned to go into private practice as a lawyer and exchanged pleasantries for a few minutes.

No proposals of a business nature were presented, according to Yamani. But, he added, it was "always possible that Agnew planned to do so some time in the future."

Two of the people closest to Agnew are known to have their eye on oil concessions and other commercial ventures in the Middle East.

Frank Jameson, the California businessman whose J-W Industries offered Agnew a job that later fell through, spent six months in Baghdad in 1958 trying to put together an oil deal that never materialized.

At a recent party at the Saudi embassy in honor of his wife, actress Eva Gabor, Jameson told at least one prominent American oil company executive of his intentions to "try again" to get concessions in that part of the world.

Jameson and his wife were socializing conspicuously with Arab ambassadors and their families here two weeks ago at a series of dinners, lunches and cocktail parties.

One gathering, a cocktail buffet, was given by Agnew himself on Jan. 23 at his house in Kenwood.

Arab ambassadors present were the envoys of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan. Iran's Ardeshir Zahedi was invited, but was out of town.

In addition, the ambassadors of Indonesia and Singapore, two other countries important in the oil world, also were there.

Comedian Danny Thomas, who is of Lebanese descent and speaks fluent Arabic, was flown from California to circulate among them.

Jameson, there as a guest, arranged to fly any of the Arab ambassadors who could make the trip out to Las Vegas two days later for Frank Sinatra's star-studded "comeback" appearance at Caesars Palace.

The group flew on a \$5 million Grumman Gulfstream that would have cost \$20,000 for the round trip if Jameson had chartered it. Instead Gruman provided it free as a "demonstrator" flight.

Agnew himself didn't go. But one of his former aides, Peter Malatesta, who was also at the Agnew party, helped with the arrangements.

Malatesta, who is currently working as a special assistant for Bicentennial Affairs at the Department of Commerce, has indicated to friends in Washington that he is planning to leave the government "sometime within the next six or seven months" to become "a kind of expediter" between the Arab world and the United States.

"If the Arabs need 2,000 air-conditioners immediately, Malatesta would supply them," one source close to him explained last week. "And if someone here wants oil, Peter could handle that."

Malatesta, before coming to work for Agnew, had connections in the oil business. According to Hassan Yassin, a private Saudi oil consultant in Washington, Malatesta and "a man named Bob Rose who used to be with Occidental Petroleum" tried unsuccessfully several years ago to obtain oil concessions in the Middle East.