

Spiro T. Agnew—Whose Hero

Is He Now?

Editor's note: Spiro Agnew has tried a bit of brokerage, plied the Persian Gulf territory and is completing a novel about a vice president who is wealthy, handsome and self-assured. Nick Thimmesch is a syndicated columnist based in Washington.)

By Nick Thimmesch

Special to the Chronicle

Since his forced resignation from the vice-presidency of the United States two years ago, Spiro Theodore Agnew has shown

a remarkable ingenuity. He startled enemies and friends



Agnew's days in the national limelight began when Richard Nixon chose him as his running mate in 1968

**Analysis
and
Opinion**

alike, even his own family, by writing a novel which will be published next year. Though he avoided the press as if it were a gang of angry antiwar activists, Agnew's name continually popped up under datelines from world capitals. Despite his plea of *nolo contendere* to a felony count on income tax evasion and despite a voluminous document, prepared by the Justice department, accusing him of bribery and extortion, Agnew steadfastly maintained that he was innocent of those charges.

Stripped of his salary, barred from practicing law and beset with legal bills, Agnew made a quick financial recovery by becoming an instant, international business broker. Whereas, normally, a man suffering his kind of disgrace might prefer to forget his years as a celebrated controversialist, Agnew regrets that no one has stepped in to invigorate his old constituency and wonders whether . . . there might just possibly be . . . an Agnew comeback?

Wasn't it Richard Nixon who said, after choosing Agnew as his running mate in 1968, "There can be a mystique about a man. You can look him in the eye and know he's got it. This guy's got it!"

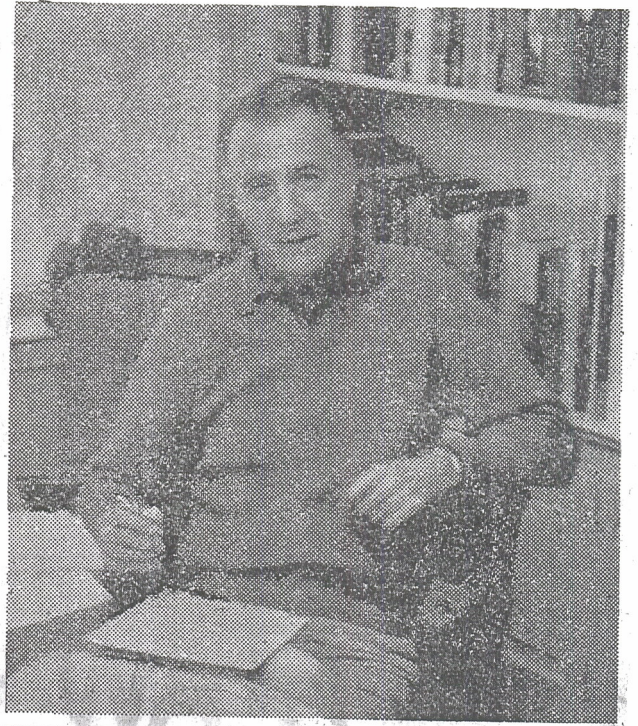
Nixon's faith in Agnew was diminished at times, once to the point of telling William D. Ruckelshaus, then director of the Environmental Protection Agency, that he was considering replacing Agnew with John Connally in 1972, presumably because Connally's "got it." Agnew survived Nixon's moment of fickleness, but not the summer of 1973, not the onslaught from the U.S. district attorney's office in Baltimore. Agnew's situation moved quickly from a rumor stage to indignant protestations of innocence to shrewd plea bargaining, crafted by then Attorney General Elliot Richardson, to resignation on a cold, wet day, Oct. 10, 1973.

These days, most of his time is spent in his suite of offices on the second floor over a savings-and-loan office in Crofton, Md.



In the two years since Spiro Agnew was forced to resign his office as vice president, he's taken to novel-writing

Faced with a Dec. 31 deadline ultimatum from his publisher, Playboy Press (brother of Playboy magazine), Agnew labors through the plot, moving his characters through Washington's bureaucracy and even off to exotic world capitals. The main character, Porter Canfield, is the vice president of the United States, "wealthy, handsome and self-assured." He is taken with Meredith Lord, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and she is "beautiful, amber-eyed" and responsive. Yes, the vice president and the H.E.W. secretary bed down several times, though the pages don't exactly sizzle with seduction.



Agnew's agent, Scott Meredith, a self-described "liberal Democrat who opposed everything Ted stood for," claims 400 pages of the work — projected for about 550 pages — is in hand, and that Agnew "is really rolling now." Meredith says, "I had to be frank and firm with him about the deadline, since he's had several extensions. So he's bearing down.

Agnew's business career is second-choice for him. He tells friends that he is a "former lawyer," a result of his disbarment in early 1974. At that point in time, to use a well-worn Watergate phrase, Agnew had only a book advance.

He reached into his resources, which amounted to some supervisory experience in a supermarket, legal work for Maryland realtors and extensive travels as vice president when he developed high-level contacts in Iran, Greece and the oil-boom Arab countries.

So Agnew's connections would be his long suit, as he opened his modest (\$480 a month) walk-up offices to house "Pathlite, Inc.," in June, 1974. Agnew's secretary, Mary Ellen Warner, then 25, was listed as sole owner, with 100,000 shares of stock at par value of \$1.

The firm would offer "consulting" services and could "own, manage and sell" property.

Agnew no sooner had his small, plastic sign hung out than he was in a partnership with Walter J. Dilbeck, Jr., an adventuresome business man of Evansville, Ind., whom Agnew had met in Frank Sinatra's Palm Springs home.

The Agnew-Dilbeck partnership seemed a natural; one had the global connections, the other the seed money. Soon it was reported that Agnew persuaded the Kuwait International Investment Company, to examine a 1600-acre forest track on Lake Barkley, Ky., for which Dilbeck held a purchase option. The land could be developed for tourism and recreation, and its selling price \$5-\$6 million, would have brought a neat \$500,000 to \$600,000 commission for Agnew-Dilbeck. But the Kuwaitis turned away from proposals to transform this land into a "water Disneyland."

There was a spate of stories about Agnew-Dilbeck deals. Indeed, by January, 1975, the team took on the image of a high-powered John Paul Getty combine, buying coal fields here and there, dealing with Arabs, Iranians and Japanese, with Agnew always at the cutting edge, making the first conquest. Most of these stories were inspired by Dilbeck himself, boasting how his friend, "Ted," would soon become a multimillionaire.

Eventually all this became too much for Agnew, who became peeved with Dilbeck. The reality is that there was no land deal with the Kuwaitis, the coal-mine ventures were largely talk and some of Agnew's best contacts in the Persian Gulf wanted no part of Dilbeck.

So Agnew struck quick and hard. In a letter he released to the press, he severed the relationship with Dilbeck, charging him with publicity seeking and violating the confidentiality of negotiations. "I must conclude," Agnew lectured, "that your exaggerations and outright misstatements of fact were a calculated scheme to

See Page 22, Col. 1



Agnew in 1969

In his private moments, Agnew must review his resentments.

The realization that he must now hustle for a buck, a far less dignified calling than that of serving his country as vice president, must make him know how low a man can fall.

Most painful of all is his knowledge that there is a middle-American constituency out there which he failed, even betrayed. And so, in these private moments, he reminds himself that survival is the primary goal, onward through the manuscript, onward to the petrodollar markets of the world. And he admonishes himself, as he did those cheering

From Page 20

promote your image at the expense of my integrity."

This letter left Dilbeck sputtering, and he cut loose at Agnew, charging him with "taking \$75,000 from me."

Since the noisy break with Dilbeck, Agnew has continued his globe-trotting. He's made trips to Persian Gulf countries, Europe and Venezuela, supposedly in the pursuit of petro-dollars.

Whatever wheeling and dealing Agnew is into these days, he must face that Dec. 31 deadline for his book, or lose a bundle of money. So he does, in fact, spend nearly all his time on it.

("SPIRO IS OUR HERO!") crowds of half a decade ago, to have purpose, be faithful to ideals, exercise a firm disciplinary check on whatever you do.

Way down there, deep in the middle of the night, he wonders if the day will come, say, five or ten years from now, when the American people will forgive and forget, and he can speak to them again, as he did in those moments of fleeting glory when he assailed the "effete corps of impudent snobs," the "pusillanimous pussy-footers," the "nattering nabobs of negativism," and of course the hopeless hysterical hypochondriacs of history."

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