

## LITTLE, BRITTLE FEET OF CLAY

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In just a few days now we'll be flying off again for a visit in Switzerland. When we started scribbling this about a week ago, we had written that while it would be a relief to get away from television, Watergate and political news, we would probably miss the outcome of the Agnew investigation.

But things have happened much faster than anticipated and now, in mid October, Mr. Agnew has already resigned in disgrace with his political career ended, presumably for good. That's too bad, really. Most of us conservative "middle Americans" were more than a little fond of Spiro. He talked the language we like to hear—articulate, forceful and to the point, without the usual evasions of most political dissemblers. We would have been happy to vote for him in a presidential election. So it's a great disappointment to discover that the ex Vice President fooled us and that he walks on the same brittle feet of clay as the rest.

All this only reinforces the impression that politics is evermore an underhanded game. It is our impression also that there are few politicians on local, state or national levels with skirts any cleaner than those of Ted Kennedy. Ordinarily, one would think that as a result of this righteous and rightful crusade against Agnew, 90% of the politicians in Washington would be quaking in fear that some of their own past and present dealings could similarly be exposed with the same tragic ending. Our cynicism is such, however, that we don't think many of them are too worried.

Political corruption is so commonplace, not only here but also the world over, that it is generally accepted as standard behavior. Lobbies and lobbyists are not maintained in Washington out of pure altruism. Favoritism in contract awarding, kickbacks, undercover contributions and influence peddling are everyday transactions. (In a burst of candor, Mr. Agnew once termed those who believe it can be otherwise as "naïve.") The Kennedy machine politics in Massachusetts, the vote fraud scandals in the 1960 election and the instances of outright presidential blackmail during JFK's three years in office—comparable examples of wrong doing—raised no sustained cries of outrage. The Bobby Baker incident and its widespread ramifications during Johnson's tenure was corruption at its worst, but it was conveniently smothered and overlooked. (For that matter, had the background and past wheeling and dealing of LBJ ever been probed with the same determination and energy as the Agnew investigation, he could never have made it out of Texas to the Senate.) Why the difference?

Well, it apparently doesn't pay to antagonize or advocate policies disagreeable to the influential liberal press. (One man has defined and pinpointed "the liberal press" as the New York Times, the Washington Post, Newsweek, Time, NBC and CBS.) Kennedy escaped because the media preferred him to Nixon; Johnson escaped (initially) because they hated Goldwater more. The variable factor in operation, then, seems to be acceptance by the wielders of influence in the communications media. If someone threatening to their power and existence looms on the horizon, a Goldwater, a Nixon, a Reagan, the ranks close and they act in unison to destroy him. Somehow, we find this double standard of press behavior and this exercise of power more demagogic and frightening than all the politicians, major and minor, with their big and little feet of clay.

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