

Nixon: He Faces A Divided, Anguished Nation

WASHINGTON—America was a nation in anguish last week, her population divided, her campuses closed, her capital shaken, her Government confused, her President perplexed.

The lines of conflict ran zigzag across the land. There was the visible line of National Guardsmen firing blindly into a crowd of students at Kent, Ohio—"one set of kids against another," in the words of the father of one of the four who fell dead. And there was the invisible line of dissent and distress running right through the President's official family—"Permit me to suggest that you consider meeting on an individual and conversation basis with members of your Cabinet," wrote Walter J. Hickel, the Secretary of the Interior, to the President.

Only six months after he had rallied a great "silent majority" to his support on the war in Vietnam, against inflation and against crime, Richard Nixon was bidding frantically for peace with a rebellious minority that challenged not only his policies but also his qualities of leadership and understanding of his people.

Only one week after he had boldly ordered American troops into Cambodia and furtively resumed the bombing of North Vietnam, the President had canceled the air raids and circumscribed the ground action in ways that suggested the very opposite of the strength he had meant to display.

Effects of Crises

So the crises that were Cambodia and Kent inflamed not only the campuses and distant battlefield. They sent tremors of fear through the White House that revolt and repression might be nearer than anyone had dared to imagine. They brought home, at least to most of the President's advisers, the realization that the

national security was endangered by much, much more than the Vietcong or Communists.

"I think school has made me hard," said Mimi Bertucci, a friend of one of the slain students in Ohio. "Bobby Kennedy's death marked the turning point in our lives—and now this. This means all hope is off. What's the use? I feel frustrated. I feel, what can we do? What kind of a democracy is this?"

"About 200 years ago there was emerging a great nation in the British Empire," wrote Secretary Hickel, lecturing his President on the American Revolution, "and it found itself with a colony in violent protest by its youth—men such as Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Madison and Monroe, to name a few. Their protests fell on deaf ears, and finally led to war. The outcome is history. My point is, if we read history, it clearly shows that youth in its protest must be heard."

And speaking to some of the students who massed in protest in Washington yesterday, and who asked him whether Vice President Agnew's "rhetoric" had contributed to the deaths at Kent, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Robert H. Finch re-

plied: "It contributed to heating up the climate in which the Kent State students were killed." But he added later that he weant in no way to suggest the Vice President had contributed to the tragedy itself.

For all the commotion thus inspired, however, there was no telling the real reaction of President Nixon. He began the fateful week at the Pentagon, symbolically enough, denouncing some campus radicals as "bums." The White House proudly mimeographed that comment, as if in support of all the more polysyllabic insults previously hurled at the young by Vice President Agnew.

And then, in tragic counterpoint, came Kent, a symbolic rendering of alienated, angry young Americans being overcome by armed and frightened young Americans. Completing the metaphor, President Nixon bemoaned the event with a comment that almost said I told you so — "When dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy."

The President had counted on opposition to his move into Cambodia and on a spring renaissance of protest on the campus; and until this moment he and his aides were still determined to ride

it out and to gather up the piles of telegrams from television land as evidence of their high standing in most of the land. The short-term exercise in escalation, after all, was supposed to insure the longer-term withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and by summertime, certainly by election time, all this shrewd calculation would be self-evident and the power, resolve, character and toughness of the United States and its President would have been demonstrated before all the world.

Cabinet Misgivings

Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird had had their misgivings—at least they did not find the move into Cambodia as "indispensable," no matter how tempting or useful militarily. They had worried about the reaction in Congress, whose sensibilities they had both learned to respect. They worried about the credibility of their Administration at home and abroad.

But no one seems to have counted on the depth of the despair that swept Congress and campus both, and to the dismay of Mr. Nixon's official family, few were even asked.

He had acted essentially on his own, out of his own sense of challenge in Southeast Asia as well as the Middle East, and with his own, lonely determination of what his people would support and what his enemies could be forced to accept and respect.

Mr. Nixon came to the end of last week contending — at a Friday 10 P.M. news conference — that he was in no way surprised by the intensity of the protest, only by the widespread misunderstanding of his objectives. He moved into Cambodia to hasten the end of the war, he insisted, and thus he really shared the objectives of his critics.

Nervous, bland but in no sense apologetic and obviously resenting the need to justify himself in living color, the President urged that while the action was hot the rhetoric remain cool, cited his own tolerance of dissent as an example of the "safety valves" that are at work to protect American society from revolution or repression, and hastily created a new phalanx of formal and informal advisers to instruct him in the mood of young America and to remind him to stay in touch.



Kent State University, Ohio, May 4, 1970

Associated Press

Then, in a highly unusual move, Mr. Nixon suddenly decided at dawn yesterday to go to the Lincoln Memorial to "rap" with some of the students gathered there. "Go shout your slogans on the Ellipse," the site of the principal rally near the White House, the President told the surprised students. "Just keep it peaceful."

But there were many men around the President, of whom Secretary Hickel became only a sudden symbol, who felt that Mr. Nixon had been the most guilty of misunderstanding the mood of the nation. Cabinet members and aides spoke of him as arithmetically political and administratively mechanical, but as lacking in "antennae" to catch the real currents of opinion and lacking in imagination to place himself truly in the vanguard of idealism.

The President tried to defuse the criticism by pledging to the members of Congress and finally

to the country that American troops would be out of Cambodia by the end of June, that they would not become embroiled in the defense of Cambodia herself and that his only purpose was to speed up the withdrawal of Americans from the war.

But there was tension inside of him. He was under attack, he noted, even though he had spoken up vigorously for men like Secretary Hickel when they were under attack. The effort to divide him from his Vice President was an "old game," he remarked knowingly. He wasn't going to fall for that by muzzling anyone. "Bums" was not meant as a slur on all dissenters, but wasn't it really too kind for those who burned books and buildings and terrorized the campus? There was nothing he had done or failed to do, he implied, that justified such a fuss.

Yet the fuss continued. Con-

struction workers tried to beat up student marchers. Students vowed to move from campus capers to Congressional politics. National Guardsmen bayoneted demonstrators. For one brief moment, at least, the granite facade of government itself cracked wide open and officials let show their resentment of the war, their despair with the isolation of the President, their sense of muddling through without purpose.

What had been a confident and even giddy Administration became suddenly introspective and skeptical, drawn closer to the demonstrators outside its portals. Those who had been shoved aside by efficient planners of war and calculating advocates of law and order suddenly felt entitled to speak up again and demand at least equal time from the President.

They hoped that he would hear them, if not also those beyond.

—MAX FRANKEL