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NYT

...Violence on the Right

The assaults by construction workers on students in downtown Manhattan yesterday were a tragic reflection of the polarization brought by the Vietnam war, campus turbulence, racial tensions and an Administration-fostered mood of political repression. Even more, the clashes in the financial district and at City Hall were a frightening lesson in the ease with which right-wing vigilantism finds in left-wing extremism an excuse for pushing aside constituted authority and enforcing its own brutal form of injustice.

The youngsters who massed in Wall Street with the declared purpose of shutting down the Stock Exchange were scarcely operating in the spirit of the "day of reflection" Mayor Lindsay had urged as a tribute to the four students killed by National Guard bullets at Kent State University. But there was no use of force until the helmeted building tradesmen marched onto the scene and initiated their own reign of terror.

The hardhats, long scornful of excesses by privileged longhairs on campus, were obviously delighted at the opportunity to pour out their hatred on the students and any who dared to raise a voice in their defense. From that it was a swift jump to City Hall for a direct-action display of their venom against the Mayor, the most articulate spokesman in public life for the right to dissent and for adult understanding of college youth's frustrations.

The police, badly outnumbered in Wall Street, were even more seriously short of men at City Hall. The result was a shambles in which the rampaging unionists beat students, smashed windows and cowed city officials into ordering the American flag back to full staff, thus canceling the half-staff memorial to the Kent State dead originally decreed by the Mayor. Not one construction worker was arrested at any stage of this civic humiliation.

The building tradesmen, of course, are in the fore-

front of those who deplore crime in the street and the decay of law and order. They have now joined the revolutionaries and bombthrowers on the left in demonstrating that anarchy is fast becoming a mode of political expression. Unless the peril in that trend becomes universally recognized, no one's liberty will be safe. American democracy can survive only in a climate of reason built on respect for law.