

Students in Politics After Kent State

By FRED M. HECHINGER

It will be a long time before the full impact of the invasion of Cambodia and the death of four students at Kent State University can be assessed but it is already clear that student movements will be deeply affected. The students' role in American politics may be drastically changed.

Whether in honest shock or in fear of the popular revulsion, the Administration has appealed for a return to non-violent dissent, and it has promised to listen to the arguments of the dissenters.

The reaction of many students has been a similar pulling back from the angry warfare that culminated in the gun-blasts at Kent State, and a new effort to change the system by its rules. An anti-war student leader said last week that those who wrote the rules knew a great deal about the importance of giving the people constitutional tools to block the abuse of Presidential powers. He asked students to use those tools.

This could be the beginning of a different ballgame. College groups across the country, many with the blessings of their institutions' presidents, are organizing for sophisticated poli-

tical activism. They are spending their time and effort in canvassing their communities, working for anti-war candidates, lobbying in Washington and even researching the facts of American policies.

Princeton's President, Robert Goheen, has endorsed a proposal to let students and faculty take off two weeks in the fall — to be made up — to support candidates of their choice for maximum pre-election impact.

Drive For Peace

Undergraduates at Columbia have enlisted students in a nation-wide political drive for peace. Yale today will descend on the not inconsiderable number of alumni in the House and the Senate to push the peace cause. The party is led by Yale's President Kingman Brewster Jr. and it includes some trustees who until recently would have characterized in students minds the intransigent establishment of a hostile generation.

From little Haverford College in the East to sedate Mills College on the West Coast, peace through politics is the frantic new movement.

Part of the movement's significance is that it is taking some of the spotlight off the

violent radicals and what Mr. Brewster calls the "tear it down" rhetoric. Many of the politicized rather than radicalized students appear determined not to destroy the system but to turn it around. There is even talk about abandoning the invective against the police.

Hurdles And Roadblocks

It would be naive and misleading to create the impression that the students' turn to political action is assured of victory. There are many hurdles and roadblocks.

Perhaps the most important question mark remains the staying power of both the students and their professional political allies.

Right now, the students are serious. Some are even cutting their hair in deference to the squares within the system, as they did in the days of Eugene McCarthy's crusade. But that crusade not only showed young people what might be accomplished; it also gave them the bitter after-taste of failure.

That letdown may have been partly responsible for the growing resort to violence. The present situation is one of the rare instances when opportunity knocks twice. But while

it rekindles hope, it cannot guarantee the outcome.

What weakens the new movement is the continuing controversy over student strikes. As long as students shout at each other, as they did at Columbia last week, "shut it down" and "open it up," energies will be dissipated and internal power struggles will sap external power. This is also a threat to university neutrality, which even such staunch anti-war spokesmen as Mr. Brewster insist is essential to academic freedom and the universities' role as a non-political force of reason.

The personal, non-institutional student exertion of political power is important not merely for its impact on Washington but to save the universities from violence and politicization. The byproduct, if the new student movement gathers strength and staying power, could be the bridging of the generation gap which today constitutes a fundamental threat to American society. It is one way to "bring us together," though not exactly what President Nixon had in mind.

FRED M. HECHINGER is a member of the editorial board of *The Times*.