

U.S. Faulted on Mobo Protest

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A committee of lawyers headed by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark accused the Nixon administration yesterday of tending to incite violence during last November's antiwar demonstrations here and then misleading the nation about what happened.

"At the very least, this was a failure of leadership, of understanding," the attorneys said. "At worst, it was a calculated effort to mislead the public, to stifle dissent and to deny constitutional rights."

The criticisms were voiced in a 57-page report by the Lawyers' Task Force, an ad hoc organization of more than 300 lawyers who monitored the Vietnam protests here last Nov. 13-15.

They found the protests peaceful by a "clear and overriding" margin, thanks to the sponsoring New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE), to "gener-



RAMSEY CLARK
... assails administration

ally sensitive and professional" city officials and police and to the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators.

But that performance, the report said, "must be contrasted to that of spokesmen for the federal government, and coverage by the news media.

"While Mayor (Walter

Washington and the police were striving to assure a peaceful weekend, official statements from the Department of Justice predicted—and tended to incite—violence... High federal officials used the latest set of rumors to create an atmosphere of fear."

Two clashes with police, the first near DuPont Circle in a march toward the South Vietnamese Embassy and the second at the Justice Department, the report said, drew only a minuscule number of demonstrators, perhaps one in a hundred bent on disruption, and were clearly opposed by MOBE leaders.

The confrontations, the lawyers said, were "more theatrical than violent," and fueled to some extent by "excessive" police use of tear gas, but were nonetheless able to "monopolize news coverage."

Finally, the report said, "after the event, and contrary to plain fact, official and unofficial spokesmen for the administration sought to portray

the weekend as one characterized generally by violence."

The report itself did not name any of the officials it faulted, but, among them, Clark said, at a news conference, were Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and the Nixon administration's director of communications, Herbert G. Klein.

Joining Clark in the findings were his fellow chairmen, Adrian S. Fisher, dean of Georgetown University law school, and E. Clinton Bamberger, dean of Catholic University law school, and the eight organizers of the Task Force project.

The conclusions, they said, were their own, but based on approximately 200 written reports submitted by the Task Force's lawyers, including some "senior members of the bar" who roamed the streets during the protest weekend.

Despite the "massive dignity" of the concluding mass march to the Washington Mon-

ument on Nov. 15, which they called the largest single political demonstration in American history, the authors said the administration managed to contribute substantially to the notion that the First Amendment may be "too costly for society to bear."

The police were faulted only for the use of tear gas and a smattering of isolated incidents. Chief Jerry Wilson and his men, the report emphasized, "set a generally high standard of professional performance," remaining good-naturedly in the background unless they thought a crisis imminent.

Other conclusions:

- A handful of determined troublemakers can always provoke it, but the only absolute

guarantee against this "would be to prohibit all large-scale public meetings."

- The television networks "for reasons of their own chose to provide no live coverage and not much of any other kind." As a result, Americans across the country got news accounts "which focused almost exclusively upon events at Dupont Circle and the Justice Department."

Alluding to a statement by Attorney General Mitchell, the report protested: "Even the specter of the Russian revolution was raised to describe what happened here... The news media did little to counter the mistaken impression thus created." Clark said he believed this worked "the greatest harm."