

Nixon Reverted to Witch-Hunt Era With Blast at Critics of Arms Policy

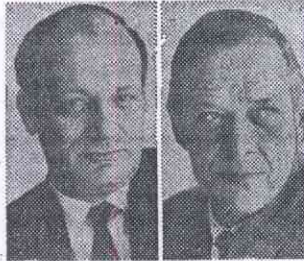
PRESIDENT NIXON'S speech at the Air Force Academy revealed a chasm of misunderstanding so broad that it is questionable whether it can be bridged during this Administration.

Mr. Nixon laid things on the line as they have not been laid on the line since the days of Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Without calling them Communists, he clearly implied that those who question our military policies are fools, cowards or both. The Era of Lowered Voices has ended.

Looking back, it seems probable that Sen. Everett Dirksen telegraphed the Administration's change of tactics when he denounced Sen. Edward Kennedy last week for his views on Hamburger Hill. Dirksen went back to ancient Rome to quote Lucius Amilius Paulus against Senators who criticize military policy.

Reporters, jealous of the richness of Dirksen's classical background, were relieved to discover he had found the quotation in a dictionary published by the Navy, under the heading "Interference, Civilian." Some reporters, knowing both men, thought Dirksen had received an autographed copy from Lyndon Johnson.

But Dirksen is a figure out of Dickens, not Dostoevski. Reporters enjoyed looking back to the Korean War, when Dirksen spoke of the national income as "bespattered with young blood" and accused President Truman



Mankiewicz Braden

of "giving us an undeclared, unconstitutional one-man war."

MR. NIXON is a much tougher opponent, and the words he chose seem certain to raise the decibel level beyond the point Ralph Nader would deem safe. Today, it is doubtful if even the token withdrawal of 25,000 troops from Vietnam will restore the balance.

He accused Senate critics of being "isolationist," of favoring "unilateral disarmament," of considering "patriotism to be backward," of "wanting to sweep the American presence from the scene." He came very close to labeling Sens. Symington, Cooper, Percy, Proxmire and many others as friends of enemies; as he reeled off the characteristics of the "new isolationists," the word "Comsymp," a word of considerable currency in the McCarthy era, came to mind.

But the Senators whom Mr. Nixon excoriated are less angered than worried. Until the speech they still hoped to convince the President that Defense Secretary

Melvin Laird might be wrong; up to now Mr. Nixon has at least been willing to listen, as Sen. John Cooper discovered when he talked to him about the ABM system as they journeyed to Louisville for the Kentucky Derby.

But the Academy speech seems to mark not only the end of lowered voices but the end of listening.

AND THIS is far more worrying—even than the possibility that Mr. Nixon is about to remind us of the days when he called former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, now almost the solitary Establishment figure supporting the ABM program, "Dean of the College of Cowardly Communist Containment."

For as the Senate critics of the arms race see it, the real issue is neither overspending, nor graft, nor whether Lockheed deals with the government at arms' length or as prodigal son. The issue is not even whether the AMB will work. The underlying issue is whether we and the Russians are like snakes in a sack, tied together not for life but for death, or whether men and nations can dominate events rather than surrender to them.

What Mr. Nixon's critics are saying is no such nonsense as he attributes to them. They are saying that the new weapons systems now in planning by both the Soviet Union and the United States—ABM and MIRV—will destroy the present balance of terror and lead to a situation in which either side may, in a moment of crisis, feel the need to strike first. They are saying that in that moment it will not be a strong defense but sheer terror which will rule.

The critics may be optimistic. It may turn out that the Soviet Union will be unwilling to call a halt in the death race. But, surely, it is a disservice to logic and reason for the President to suggest that those who urge him to find out are cowards or fools.