

TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1970

Washington: The Latest Fad—Wrong-Way Politics

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, April 30—If you're a little confused about what's going on around here these days, it may be because you haven't caught on to the new rule of politics. The new rule is that logic is out and reverse logic is in, and under this rule everybody talks and acts against his own self-interest and in the interest of his opponent.

Take a small example. Kingman Brewster, the president of Yale, loves his university and the law. So he makes a statement that he is "skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in this country."

This was supposed to help protect Yale from the wrath of the Black Panthers, but all it did was to hurt Brewster, Yale and the law, and give Vice President Agnew a fit. But wait.

Spiro's 'Revenge'

The Vice President, in his anger, applied the same reverse logic. He called publicly for the dismissal of Mr. Brewster and thus provoked a massive demonstration in Mr. Brewster's support. It is an interesting new technique.

Another way to understand the new wrong-way politics is to remember that everybody's now his own worst enemy. Pat Moynihan at the White House thought a little less controversy about the race problem would be a good thing for the Negroes and everybody else. So he used a fancy phrase to convey his idea—"benign neglect." Result: the opposite of what he intended: more controversy over race relations than before.

Nixon's Tactics

It is only when reverse logic is practiced at the very pinnacle of the Government that you see the possibilities of the new system. President Nixon wanted a Southerner on the Supreme Court and led the charge with such aggressive clumsiness that he had to settle for a pleasant man from Minnesota.

His formula for "bringing us together" is to tear us apart, and his latest experiment with the new technique is an attempt to end the war quicker in Vietnam by expanding it into Cambodia.

One has to wonder what ever happened to all the early talk about low profiles and lower

voices and Nixon Doctrines to minimize American involvement in other people's wars. It was working fine for the President.

By bringing the boys home from Vietnam, cutting the military budget, sweet-talking the Congress, and crying peace to the world, he had the Democrats, the demonstrators, and even the press off balance or off-key, and then he began to overplay his hand.

Now there is a reaction to the backlash. There is more opposition in the Senate today to the President's move into Cambodia than to any other Presidential action in the foreign policy field in the last ten years. The President's challenge to the Senate's constitutional right of confirmation has aroused the upper chamber against him, and even the Democrats are beginning to think they may still be alive.

In short, the old rule of compensations is at work again. Every excessive pressure produces a counter-pressure. This rule worked at first against the militants who resorted to violence. It worked against the press when it overplayed the violence and the negative. It

worked against the excessive profit margins of business and the stock market, and it is working now against the Administration's policy in Cambodia.

The Bad Time

No doubt this will all settle down in time, but the mood of the moment is anxious and even irrational. Even if the President succeeds in his policies of clearing out the military sanctuaries in Cambodia and bringing the boys back home, there is clearly no assurance that the enemy will not drift back into Cambodia, or create new and even more dangerous diversions elsewhere, as the Soviet fighter pilots and missile technicians are now doing in the Middle East.

It is a bad time in foreign relations, race relations, university relations, economic relations and human relations, and the Administration seems to be developing an infallible instinct for doing the wrong thing. The unavoidable perplexities are understandable but the avoidable stupidities are intolerable. Failure seems to have gone to their heads.