

# The Coming Political Struggle

By JAMES RESTON

Keeping up with the political moods and fads of the United States these days is a puzzling business. They go up and down like women's skirts. Less than a year ago the university community and the black community were in a rebellious mood, and now, we are told, they are leaderless, divided and apathetic.

Well, maybe so, but nothing in this country is ever quite as definite, as good or as bad as the trend-seekers and headline-writers make out. The atmosphere has changed, but nothing fundamental in world or national politics has really been transformed. The war goes on, with the same strategy on both sides, but with different tactics. Washington, Moscow and Peking have modified their propaganda but not their objectives.

It is the same in world economics. Moscow promises more consumer goods in its next five-year plan. The Nixon Administration promises more jobs and less inflation. The rich nations and the poor nations of the world, and the rich and poor people at home, are roughly where they were a year ago, and unless there is some ghastly thunderclap in the news, the chances are that present war and economic policies will have to work themselves out on the battlefield and in the market place.

In short, there is not likely to be any basic difference in the policies of Washington, Moscow, Peking, Saigon or Hanoi until there is a change of government in these capitals, and

## NEW YORK

maybe not even then. The Democrats, meeting in Washington this week, have an agreement not to attack one another, but they have no foreign or domestic policy for the war or the economy, and could not define one without attacking each other. So everybody is playing the old political game, organizing arguments and staffs, and waiting to see what happens on the battlefields of Indochina, Wall Street, industry and the welfare rolls, nobody quite knowing what is going to happen.

In this situation, it is easy to understand the apathy of the people who feel frustrated and even defeated by the struggle of the last few years, and are now loitering down into silence and despair. There is even a kind of wisdom in their melancholy indolence, for the President's war policy and economic policy are set, and no new confrontations, or demonstrations, or challenges in the Senate over Laos or unemployment are likely to change them in the next few months.

Still, if the people of all ages who are unhappy with the old politics really want to do something about it, now is the time. If they want to influence present policies, or future Presidential candidates in both parties, it is not too early to begin.

The Supreme Court has given the vote in the next Presidential election to 11.5 million Americans between the ages of 18 and 21. This could easily be decisive in the Presidential election of 1972. Mr. Nixon lost the 1960 elec-

tion to John Kennedy by 113,000 votes, and Mr. Nixon, in a spectacular comeback, won the election of 1968, but with only 43 per cent of the vote.

What is happening now is that the two major political parties are beginning to organize in their usual ways, arguing with one another about who is responsible for the killing in Vietnam and the unemployment and inflation at home, but the new black voters and the new 18-21 year-old voters probably hold the decisive margin.

The interesting thing about all this is that the young people who have been challenging both parties and old establishment values may very well have won, but don't know it. Because they didn't win everything in their first challenge, they are now full of self-pity and despair.

This is very odd in a generation that regards itself as superior, wiser and more compassionate than the old liberal geezers of the past, but the fact is that they now have the votes in their own age group, between 18 and 30, to influence policy and even to determine the outcome of the Presidential election of 1972.

They do, however, have to come alive and organize. They cannot merely complain or demonstrate or use violence to impose their will on the rest, but if they register the 18-21-year-olds, and ally themselves with the other voters who are disillusioned by both parties, they might very well influence war policy and economic policy between now and 1972. And they could be decisive in the next Presidential election.