

On Wisconsin

By ANTHONY LEWIS

MADISON, Wisc.—Harold Rohr, known to everybody as Babe, has been a local symbol of hard-hat support for the Vietnam war. He is president of the Madison Building Trades Council. As an alderman a few years ago he fought the peace groups and opposed a referendum on the war.

Babe Rohr has just come out for "immediate" withdrawal of all American forces from Indochina. When he said that on the radio the other night, a woman in the antiwar movement was so astounded that she telephoned him to ask if she had heard right. He laughed and said he had changed his mind about a lot of things.

The transformation of Babe Rohr reflects a shift in public attitudes out here that a visitor finds astonishing. The instinctive trust in the President that used to be so evident, the patient willingness to give his policy of gradual and aggressive withdrawal a chance—that mood is gone or going fast.

The impression does not come just from this university town, with its liberal tradition. Consider the comment of a leading Republican in central Wisconsin.

"It has happened in the last three months," he said. "Now nobody cares how we get out, with honor or without, with something we can claim as a victory or not. It's rampant—not just the students and the peaceniks.

"People are saying, 'Ike did it in six months in Korea. What the hell is Nixon monkeying around about?'"

Here in Madison, the Student Association of the University of Wisconsin has just completed its annual symposium. In this remarkable project, the association brought politicians and philosophers and others from all over the country to lecture and talk during a two-week period; many of the programs were broadcast throughout the state.

The theme this year was alternative futures for America. And so, in many different ways, people talked about how this country has to change—and whether it can change fast enough. Naturally there were those who said "the system" had to be replaced. But what was interesting was the relative absence of provocative rhetoric, revolutionary or stand pat, and the general acceptance at all age levels of the need for change.

The muted tone of the students came partly in reaction to the bomb-

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ing of the Army Mathematic Research Center on campus last August; that terrible event took a lot of the glamor out of the rhetoric of violence. But as the students have sounded more moderate, so also have some older people become more sympathetic to their unchanged views on what is wrong with America: the war most of all.

There may, for example, be a widening realization of what Vietnam is doing to the American people's attitude toward defense policy generally.

It is no surprise that students turn their feelings of revulsion over what we have done in Indochina into a general disapproval of American intervention anywhere. One faculty member here said he guessed that 90 per cent of his students, regardless of their political outlook otherwise, would be deeply skeptical of the whole apparatus of alliances and the American military role in world politics that we have accepted as a premise of policy for a generation.

What is surprising is the indication that those who believe in American strength as the basis of world order are beginning to see Vietnam as a threat.

The new Democratic Governor of Wisconsin, Patrick Lucey, spoke last month to a lunch of National Guard leaders. As a critic of the war, he thought he could not avoid the subject. What he did was warn that "this ill-advised war" was destroying public respect for the military and hurting the ability to fund "legitimate defense needs." He was amazed when the audience cheered.

At the student symposium, Richard Scammon, the political analyst and explorer of middle America, said he thought a consensus was developing against the war for a simple reason: the public has concluded that basic American interests are not at stake in Vietnam, so it asks: if we're going to get out, why not now?

The question is whether this change of public mood with all its significance for limiting his options in Indochina, is getting through to President Nixon, loud and clear.

"It's like a joke I heard awhile ago on 'Laugh-In,'" a Republican said. "The majority isn't silent. Washington is deaf."