



Nation Can't Ignore Questions of Youth

WASHINGTON — President Nixon, speaking off the cuff in a crowded Pentagon corridor, neatly divided America's youth into two broad categories: 1. Those who are pursuing an elusive enemy in Vietnam and Cambodia, in his view, are heroes. 2. But those who are stirring up trouble on the campuses are "bums." As one reporter who has mixed with these young people both in Vietnam and on the campuses, I have something to say on the subject. I have shot the bull with grimy soldiers in the Vietnam rain forests, where the give-and-take was punctuated by the crackle of gunfire. I have also sat up past midnight discussing world issues with shaggy students at two dozen colleges since September.

The youth are raising questions about our national priorities that can no longer go unheeded. From the foxholes to the coffee houses, their questions are becoming more urgent.

Should Americans continue to shell out 70 cents of every tax dollar for defense, the younger generation wants to know, and neglect the social problems that are undermining security at home?

Is the United States, the bulwark of the free world, going the way of the great-powers of the past whose strength was sapped by moral decay? It has been social breakdown, not outside aggression, that has brought down the great nations of history.

The taxpayers have spent a breathtaking trillion dollars for national defense since the end of World War II. U.S. combat forces are now fighting in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. They are protecting a precarious truce in Korea and coming perilously close to military involvement in half-a-dozen other countries.

Sun Never Sets

Truly, the sun never sets on America's bewildering military entanglements. For the State and Defense Departments have worked steadily and purposefully to build a network of alliances until America's octopus fingers reach into just about every trouble spot in the world.

The United States today is bound by eight security treaties to defend with its great might 42 nations, democracies and dictatorships alike. American military missions have also become involved in the defense of another 26 nations.

Yet the pages of history are littered with the remains of nations that overextended themselves militarily, nations that spread their resources and manpower too

thin. The young people want to know whether the United States is falling victim to the same mistake.

A staggering \$82 billion has been spent and more than 41,600 American lives have been lost, for example, in faraway Vietnam. Thanks to this tremendous outlay, the U.S. government has succeeded in making the streets of Saigon safer than the streets of Washington.

Most young people, if my campus discussions are at all representative, believe our tax money could be better spent fighting poverty, pollution, crime and injustice at home.

The Nihilistic Spirit

Result: Our questing youth are taking up new, sometimes radical, causes. The nihilistic spirit of China's Red Guards has infected some of our own disheveled young men and stringy-haired young women. A disturbing number have turned away from the ethics of their elders.

A small militant minority are preaching revolution, calling for the overthrow of the government. They don't seek to correct the wrongs but to exploit them, to tear down, not to build up.

These radical, Communist-oriented groups are in communication with one another. Dr. Clifford Wharton, the distinguished black president of Michigan State University, told me these groups send agitators from campus to campus stirring up the students.

An increasing number of students are speaking the language of revolution. It would be a tragic mistake, however, for the older generation to categorize most students as radicals, revolutionaries or "bums." They are deeply concerned, if not always fully informed about vital issues that their parents have largely ignored.

There is also some evidence that moderates are no longer sitting back and letting the radicals take over the leadership. At Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa., for example, the moderate majority supported a student strike but managed to quench the firebrands.

At an emotional rally, one cried out to the sloganeering militants: "If you don't care what happens to Lehigh, take your \$3,000 (tuition fee) and pull out."

The students agreed to meet with the faculty and thus began an amazing 50-hour marathon, with brief hours out for sleeping, at the school's cavernous Grace Hall.

Lehigh may have found a "third way" for the nation's embattled students, a compromise between undergraduate mayhem and police repression.