

Measuring the Heat

Professional politicians discuss adverse public opinion in much the way professional soldiers assess casualty outlook.

"How much heat will we take?" is the politician's equivalent to the soldier's "What's the estimated casualty ratio?"

Both kinds of calculations went into the planning for the Cambodian campaign, and it is now clear that at least one of the estimates—heat—was extremely low.

The hard-soft division within President Nixon's top advisory group became apparent with the first waves of revulsion that swept the nation.

Nixon's hard guys had advised him there would be heat, but that it would be tolerable, and anyway worth it.

Nixon's moderates, who had advised him otherwise, were not long in identifying themselves and disassociating themselves from the Cambodia decision.

The best guesses we can get suggest that the rift is widening. The Mitchell-Agnew hard line and the Finch-Hickel soft line are diverging fast; Nixon can't ride 'em both.

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THE CAMBODIAN incursion, and the related Kent State killings that arose out of student protest, required the Nixon people to make some more "heat" estimates immediately.

Again the hard-liners appeared to prevail. Nixon's public statements provided cold comfort to the aroused students—or their concerned parents.

The Wall Street Journal, in an interesting paragraph, predicted that the White House will encourage Republican candidates in the fall elections to "run against the youths."

Obviously another tactical assessment by the hard-liners had been made: That support by the young this fall will be more of a liability than a help, and that the national mood will tend toward a rebuke for the protesters, rather than sympathy for them.

There is in all of this a repulsive display of the worst side of professional politics. It is not endearing to witness the vote-count calculations which lie behind high policy decisions. We'd like to be left

with at least the illusion of principles in high places.

If Republicans are to "run against the youths" (which is often easier than running against their Democratic opponents) they ought to do so in the conviction that the young are wrong, and not because the tacticians think an anti-youth stance will please the yahoos.

Proving that the young are wrong—in principles as well as tactics—is by now no means easy.

It is not only the young who are gravely disquieted by the growing concentration of power in the executive branch, and the isolation of that branch from genuine public opinion.

When the young question the Constitutional legality of the Cambodian venture, as an example, they are doing what a strong representative Congress ought to be doing for them.

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BUT THE DECAY of Congress as an institution, with its increasingly tight domination by small men from safe districts, men who merely survive and by survival accede to power, has long been evident.

With the committee system, and its complete subjection to the old seniority hacks, the nation is entirely without a LEGAL means of debating issues of high public moment. If we have no forum other than an executive election every four years, why should we be surprised if our streets and campuses are filled with clamor and fury?

The young are saying, and quite correctly, that repeated national plebiscites for peace have been ignored and distorted. Lyndon B. Johnson took office with an overwhelming mandate for peace, and for peace specifically in Southeast Asia. Richard Nixon was elected amid the ruins of Johnson's contrary policies.

Not only has our quadrennial election forum proved an inadequate means of expressing the public will—it has served us falsely because we have seen that it is capable of being corrupted.

We old Jeffersonians, in some despair, can only look to Congress. And to assessments of principles, not vote-count.