



Pullout Would Prove The System Still Works

WASHINGTON — America's children gathered here in great number, proving among other things their belief that the system still works. Grudgingly, and with bitterness, the President is providing the evidence that they are right. The point is important. The danger—post-Cambodia—is national disillusionment with our form of government. If the Founding Fathers had borrowed the parliamentary system, the President would now have to go to the country, and those who oppose the war could participate directly in the debate and the vote. But as the dean of one of the nation's oldest colleges asked the other day, "What can we suggest that people do?"

The answer — first of all — is what they are already doing. The closing of colleges across the country, the letter from the college presidents, the reaction in the Senate and the press have already affected the President.

Are the students in uproar? Then say the amount of time troops will be in Cambodia is reduced from eight weeks to six.

Does the protest from the presidents of our most prestigious colleges and universities, including — unkindest cut of all — Fr. Theodore Hepsburgh of Notre Dame, seem impressive? Then say we won't go a step beyond 21 miles.

Is the stock market plunge in the headlines? Then lower the margin requirements.

It is careening day-to-day politics nearly out of control. One is tempted to call it unprincipled politics. When the President set July 1 — the beginning of the fiscal year — as the date for withdrawal from Cambodia, he gave the show away.

If the military objective was worth it, as the President said it was on national television, then so be it. If the "Central Office" of the Viet Cong had to be captured, then it had to be captured — even if it might be 22 miles inside Cambodia.

It is as though Franklin Roosevelt, confronted with national alarm over casualties at Salerno 26 years ago last September, had declared that we would pull the troops back to Sicily no matter what, by Nov. 1.

This is neither military logic nor na-

tional policy. It is only political survival.

So is the cut in margin requirements. If the President were serious about fighting inflation, he would not make it easier for speculators to borrow money. There is only one reason for lowering margin and that is to give the stock market a quick shot in the arm, with the almost certain consequence that as even the speculators realize the President is not serious about fighting inflation the market will go down again.

Sufficient unto the day is the effort to hold down the outcry. That seems to be the presidential logic, and in the course of it the outcry is determining the events. The system does work, after all.

But reaction is not a substitute for policy, and it leads to nasty displays of temper, such as the President permitted himself when he called students "bums" and commented on the tragedy at Kent State in terms that appeared to blame the dead. If the President of the United States labels a group as "bums," National Guardsmen may have less respect for their lives. Tempers escalate.

Which is why the President was wise to go before the nation again in the form of a press conference to try to tone down the temper.

By his own tacit admission the policy of Vietnamization has failed. An amendment sponsored by Sens. George McGovern, Mark Hatfield, Harold Hughes and Charles Goodell would substitute a timetable for getting out.

But there is a third alternative: a presidential promise to withdraw. That would turn reaction into policy and prove that the system still works.