

The New D.C. Protests-- Where They Went Wrong

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The anti-war protests in the capital are based on the notion that if you keep people from going to their offices in Washington you interfere with the efficiency and policies of the government, but this is obviously ridiculous.

Efficiency increases here in direct proportion to the rate of absenteeism. Studies of bureaucratic production in both the age of Coolidge and the age of the computer demonstrate the same general conclusion: halving the work force doubles the work.

Calvin Coolidge reduced this to an aphorism. My distinguished colleague Arthur Krock once asked him: "How many people work for you in the White House?" Coolidge replied: "About half of them."

PRIMARY

The two primary causes of inefficiency in Washington are overstaffing and boredom, too many drones showing up with nothing exciting to do. The anti-war demonstrations, sit-ins, and scuffles with police at the office tend to remove this tedium and add a little zest and even fun to the poor bureaucrat's life.

Franklin Roosevelt ran the last world war with a White House staff about half as large as the crew now working for Henry Kissinger alone in the executives offices.

The War, State and Navy departments used to work out of that one big building at the corner of 17th and Pennsylvania avenues, now overcrowded by only a portion of the White House assistants,

so the militants had better re-think their problem.

"We're going to shut this place down," they shouted at the Justice Department the other day. But that would only leave the place to J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, who are scattered all over creation.

The techniques of bombing Congress and stopping traffic by lying down on the Memorial Bridge are equally harmful to the militants' cause. The one single act that has produced a unanimous spirit in the House and Senate this year was the explosion in the Capitol basement — and their reaction was against the bombers and their cause.

This is not to say that the anti-war demonstrations of the past have not influenced the Administration to speed up the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, but only when they had the weight of public opinion behind them.

INFLUENCE

What influences the President and his policies now is not militant physical action but political action, not street demonstrations but voting registrations. There are now several opportunities for political action that badly need public support.

First there is the registration of the newly enfranchised 18-to-21-year-olds for the Presidential election of 1972, and also the registration of those citizens who will be away from their homes next year and can for the first time take advantage of the new 30-day residence requirement clause in the 1970 voting rights act.

Second, there is a bill before the Senate, introduced by Senator Jacob Javits of New York, which would au-

thorize the President to take military action against an enemy for only 30 days, and after that only if his actions were approved by Congress.

CANDIDATE

And, there is an opportunity before the Democrats, which they probably won't take, to make up their minds on a candidate for the presidency this year instead of tearing themselves apart in a party squabble and going into the election with a weakened organization and an exhausted candidate.

Thus, there is plenty of work for an effective and vigorous political opposition to do, but if it is to be effective it has to be discriminating and nonviolent.

For example, Xuan Thuy, the North Vietnamese delegate at the Paris peace talks, said an interesting thing the other day, which deserves more attention than it has received.

"I propose," he said, "that at this conference, this very day, or tomorrow, or another day of your choice, we discuss the question of fixing the date for the withdrawal from South Vietnam of United States forces and of those of other countries in the American camp, so as to be able then to take up the question of the guarantee of the security of the United States soldiers during their withdrawal, and the question of the release of captured troops..."

The Administration has brushed this off as old stuff and propaganda, but since the President has been emphasizing the security of his troops and the release of the POWs the proposition is at least worth discussing, but probably won't be without pressure from the public and the families of the POWs.

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