

# The Leaderless Rabble

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, May 4—What the latest spring madness in Washington proves, if anything, is that the people are sick of violence—the violence of the war and the mob action of the antiwar demonstrators as well.

It is easy to sympathize with the protests of the pathetic rabble that came here this week, most of whom were ten or eleven years old when the United States got into the Vietnam war, but even this increasingly war-weary capital was against them.

If the people had been with them, all they would have had to do was drive their cars on to the bridges and into the other bottlenecks of the city's innumerable circles and abandon them there. Maj. Pierre Charles l'Enfant designed this capital for traffic jams, and a sullen population, determined to paralyze transportation, could have blocked it stiff.

But this is not the mood of the people here. They are not militant but sad, and most of them love this city, especially when it is flowering in the spring. They do not want to see it humiliated any more than it has been in the last few years, so they went to work through the barricades and ignored the demonstrators as much as they could.

Besides, the cops were much more professional this time, and the young men and women far less militant than they look on the television and in the newspaper pictures. This is not a revolutionary movement in any accurate sense of those words. Their most desperate and aggressive leaders have been jailed or broken down, and what is left is a disillusioned collection of roving bands, without enough public support to shut down anything more vigilant than a university.

It is still possible, of course, that in the desperation of their failure, a few of them can still create some ghastly incident, but the ingredients for a mass uprising against the Government—blazing anger, cadres of skilled, well-armed guerrilla leaders and popular support for spectacular violence—are simply not present.

Last week there was something infinitely ironic and melancholy in the public witness of the veterans against the war, but this week the mob was disorganized by one sudden push by the police, and it never regained its unity or poise.

As an instrument of propaganda, this kind of mass protest is still effective in giving the impression abroad that

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the United States is on the verge of anarchy. The reports of the television clips and newspaper photographs in European and Asian cities are troubling, not because they convey the truth, but because they distort the truth.

Even in this country the pictures of this week's demonstrations, focusing on the landing helicopters and the struggles around the police vans, tend to make the confrontations seem much more massive and menacing than they actually were, and this sort of thing inevitably arouses opposition to the entire antiwar movement.

The saddest characters in the capital now, outside the kids with cracked ribs and skulls, are the more moderate political leaders who have been working for a political settlement of the war by the end of the year.

They feel that, for the moment, they have lost control of the antiwar movement and are already being condemned by some of their constituents, as if they were to blame for demonstrations many of them actually opposed.

There is no evidence, however, that the Administration is trying this time to identify these antiwar politicians with the demonstrators who were here this week, or that it is changing its policy to take advantage of the opposition to the young militants.

Attorney General Mitchell watched the demonstrations, and was personally involved in directing the defense of the capital. Also, much has been learned since the tragedy at Kent State a year ago about how to handle the demonstrators. Sometimes this leads to rough police action, as was the case in many incidents here this week, but at least the risk of sniping and police gunfire was substantially reduced.

What has not been reduced, however, is the gap between the Administration's war policy and the antiwar sentiment of the rising generation. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the people of this city, while not sympathetic to mob action to shut down the Government, are still fundamentally against the war and the present pace of withdrawal from the conflict.

President Nixon may have gained some flexibility as a result of this week's struggles, but the longing here is overwhelmingly for peace abroad and a little quiet at home.