

Dormant, Not Dead

IN THE NATION



Mark Jury

By TOM WICKER

WINSTON-SALEM, N. C., Sept. 22—Many of the seven hundred or so persons who braved a downpour to gather in the chapel at Wake Forest University were puzzled at the news just in from Washington. The Senate had passed the draft bill, after gutting the Mansfield Amendment to withdraw all American troops from Vietnam in nine months.

Maybe the Senate's action, coming after a seven-month struggle, reflected a feeling among Senators that the public has lost interest in the war, that it is no longer a cutting political issue and that Mr. Nixon has won public permission to "wind it down" in his own way at his own pace. But if so, you couldn't tell it here.

The gathering in the chapel was sponsored by the local chapter of the North Carolina Committee to End the War, and it was only the latest in a series of successful meetings. Yet, this Southern industrial city is not noted for political radicalism, and neither is Wake Forest; and the South generally is considered the most hawkish part of the country.

So Mr. Nixon—as well as Senators who once again refused to put any real check on his power to conduct

the war as he sees fit, and for as long—should not be under the impression that opposition to the war is dead. In fact, the Winston-Salem meeting was a good example of the extent to which it has spread beyond "the kids" and the radicals to the middle class, the affluent and the middle-aged.

That may be one reason why the antiwar movement seems less vociferous and active than a year or so ago; it's been infiltrated by age and moderation. Another is that Mr. Nixon's prospective Democratic opponents are primarily battling among themselves at the moment, rather than attacking the President on the war issue.

American casualties have been greatly reduced, diminishing the sharpest point on which opponents of the war could focus. Unilateral withdrawal does continue, if far too slowly and even though the end result is uncertain. Numerous other major concerns—Mr. Nixon's China venture, his spectacular economic self-reversal and the consequent wage-price freeze, the tragedy at Attica—have dominated the headlines for weeks.

But now the students are returning to the campus after a long summer of dispersal, and—as has been true from its beginnings—they are still the heart and core of the peace movement. Many possibilities lie ahead that could arouse them to the old pitch—perhaps with new allies.

For one thing, the full impact of President Thieu's bizarre manipulation of his country's election process has not yet been felt. If the one-man election formally makes him South Vietnam's dictator, or if his high-handed tactics bring on a coup or substantial political unrest in Saigon, the political effect in this country could be incendiary, and not just among doves. The familiar "self-determination" rationale for continuing the war would be destroyed.

For another thing, Mr. Nixon soon must announce his plan for the next phase of withdrawal. Unless it points specifically to total withdrawal some time soon, it could bring an explosive reaction—particularly since draft calls now will be going out again and this year's college freshmen and later classes will receive no student deferments.

Early in 1972, moreover, Representative Pete McCloskey will be opening a primary campaign directly concentrated on Mr. Nixon's war policy. And sooner or later as the Democratic field narrows, other candidates, too, will be turning their attentions to Mr. Nixon and Vietnam.

Because of his failure to respond to the National Liberation Front proposals at Paris, the President can no longer distort the prisoner-of-war issue to anesthetize the opposition. The military apparently fear a major Communist offensive as American dwindle. And every time Mr. Nixon resumes the bombing of North Vietnam, he plays with political fire.

Any or all of these things—and others—could give vigorous new energy to a peace movement that is alive and well in Winston-Salem, and probably no more than dormant elsewhere.