

In The Nation: Missing the Point of the Mobe

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, Nov. 17—Attorney General Mitchell told the nation Sunday that the gathering of a quarter-million Americans in Washington to demonstrate against the war had not been peaceful enough. On another network, Herbert G. Klein, the Administration's director of communications, insisted that the majority of the people support the President, no matter how big the turnout was.

The facts are that:

—The kind of violence Mr. Mitchell and the Justice Department said in advance that they expected was never remotely in evidence. A magnificent performance by the Washington police and the Mobilization marshals, a jovial and generous spirit in the immense crowd, the nature of the occasion, perhaps even the clear but cold weather, kept the violence to a minimum. The incidents that did occur were clearly the work of fringe groups.

—Nobody ever claimed that the size of the turnout would be an accurate guide as to how many people do or do not support Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policies. It was a much bigger gathering than the Administration

wanted and it might well be asked whether Herb Klein or anybody else believes he could get 250,000 people together anywhere in this country to march in support of Richard Nixon and the present pace of his peacemaking. But the real point is simply that the Mobe showed once again that a huge and dynamic segment of the population wants that pace speeded up, and sharply.

The Hard Fact

That is the fact that confronts Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Klein after the Mobe. That is the fact that they tried to diminish on television. That is the fact that Mr. Nixon, behind the wall of parked buses that surrounded the White House, tried to ignore by tuning in the Purdue-Ohio State game (not that he could have found any of those unfair Eastern liberal networks televising perhaps the largest crowd ever seen in America, and certainly in Washington; where were they?)

But this hard fact will not go away. The protest movement is not a fringe group of violent extremists. It is not a small and unreasonable minority. It is a serious, sizable, sustained element of American politics

that, while it may or may not be a majority, certainly is not silent. It is active, growing, determined and here to stay.

Nevertheless, the reaction of Mr. Klein and the Attorney General, which may be taken for that of the President, suggest not only that Mr. Nixon is standing firm on his approach to Vietnam, which was to be expected; they suggest also that the Administration will persist in trying to discredit and deny the importance of the opposition to that approach. Like King Canute and Lyndon Johnson, it will try to command the waves to cease.

But if the President continues to make policy on the pretense that the protest movement is not serious, he will be basing that policy on an unreality.

No Time for Delusion

Take, for instance, the empty debater's argument that a President cannot make decisions under the pressures of a street mob; of course he can't, but no one expected Mr. Nixon to take a look out the window on Saturday, then call Hanoi. What he might be expected to do is to stop deluding himself that there is enough unity in this country to permit, without seri-

ous political and social disruption, the long, dubious process of "Vietnamization."

The Administration also asserts that peace demonstrations encourage Hanoi to hold out. But not only does the evidence suggest that Hanoi—certainly the N.L.F.—will hold out anyway; surely it is unrealistic for Mr. Nixon to expect the peace movement, with its origins and experience, to swallow its moral objections to the war and its political doubts about his policies so that he can move unhurriedly toward a faraway and ill-defined end. It is the most frightening of his difficulties that so many Americans no longer trust their leaders that much.

The point the Nixon Administration seems to miss, as its predecessor did, is that the main cost of the war is in America itself—the alienation of the young as well as more and more of their elders from a political system that appears ineffective and a Government that seems unresponsive—and it is far too great for any interest that might conceivably be pursued in Vietnam. That Mr. Nixon cannot see this is why he could not see the mobilization for what it was.