

The President's Plea to Youth

Mr. Nixon appeared before the students of the University of Nebraska wearing, as he might put it, his Presidential hat. It is an infinitely more suitable attire than the hard hat sported by the President and his associates during last fall's campaign.

His appeal for "an alliance between generations" is a welcome return to Mr. Nixon's inaugural theme of unity after it had been so deplorably undermined by subsequent tactics of division. It is precisely because of this inconsistency in the President's approach and in his Administration's record that concerned young Americans may be pardoned if they demand more than a conciliatory speech.

Young Americans cheer the President's promise of peace. But they cannot overlook the new tactic or indeed the very terminology of "protective reaction strikes" against North Vietnam.

Young Americans welcome the President's expression of concern for the environment. But they must wonder when he fires a Secretary of the Interior who has demonstrated that concern and appoints another who has given little, if any, evidence of it.

Young Americans applaud the President's eloquence on the needs of education. But how are they to reconcile those words with policies that give relatively far more attention to the needs of mismanaged industry or of the highway-builders than to the crisis of the schools, the universities and of basic research?

Young Americans share the President's concern over "poverty in a land of plenty." But can they fail to ask why Mr. Nixon, after expressing sympathy for the unemployed, translates these sentiments into tax relief for business.

As a concrete token of his understanding of the search for effective ways to harness the idealism of youth, Mr. Nixon has proposed creation of a new Volunteer Service Corps. The concept of massive nonmilitary national service—in the battle against urban and rural poverty and educational neglect at home and abroad—is sound. But more is needed than a new bureaucratic cover for existing programs. It is because these programs have come to be buffeted by political pressure and fiscal uncertainties that the flame of spontaneity has grown dim.

The President is right in urging young people to join forces with their elders within the system, eliminating its injustices, inefficiencies and corruptions. He properly rejects the negative pose of those who drop out because they deny responsibility for reforming a world they never made. But the task of making the system work, while inescapably the business of each new generation, remains the immediate duty of those elected for that purpose. The example of action persuades; exhortation alone will fail.