

They Were Hoping to Tell Him Something 'New'

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New York Times (1857-Current file); Oct 19, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2003)

pg. E1



The New York Times (by Carl Gossett)

VIETNAM PROTEST: Office workers jam the Wall Street district for an antiwar rally, one of hundreds during last week's nationwide Vietnam "moratorium." The immediate question was whether the protest would lead to a change in President Nixon's

policy. "The answer from the White House was that business, including the serious business of winding down the war on Mr. Nixon's own schedule and according to the dictates of his private conscience, would proceed much as usual."

President and Dissenters

They Were Hoping to Tell Him Something 'New'

WASHINGTON — Outside the White House, protesters against the Vietnam war marched in the night in a solemn candlelight procession. Inside, President Nixon kept to his working schedule, telephoning a long message of congratulations to a party fundraising dinner in California.

It was a test of wills between demonstrators trying to move the President and Mr. Nixon who had insisted he would not be moved "whatsoever." Even before the "Vietnam Moratorium" last Wednesday the Administration did its best to remove the sting from the day of protest against the Nixon war policies.

In a big flurry of activity two weeks ago the President summoned his military and diplomatic chieftains to Washington for high-level talks on Vietnam, won an endorsement of his policies from Hubert H. Humphrey, announced he would make a nationwide address on Vietnam Nov. 3 and ousted Lieut. Gen. Lewis B. Hershey, the students' arch-villain, from his post as head of the Selective Service System. On the eve of the demonstration, Vice President Agnew, at a White House news conference, called on the moratorium leaders to repudiate Hanoi's support of the demonstration. Though there was probably a good deal of substantive merit to at least some of those moves, they were widely interpreted as part of an orchestrated effort to nullify dissent.

The 'Moratorium'

If so, Mr. Nixon's maneuvers did not work. The end was not achieved. For on Wednesday, much to the astonishment of the doubters and the delight of its sponsors, the nationwide "moratorium" happened. But it was more than a happening, for it involved not only the young but also their elders, not only the poor but also the well-to-do, not only the disenfranchised but also men who once held power and men who currently hold power.

It was full of surface contradictions. Carefully planned by youthful organizers, it derived its spontaneity from the middle-aged. Designed as a confrontation, it had all the marks of a love-in. It was not only decorous but efficient. Based initially on a narrow premise—that the only way out of Vietnam was quick withdrawal—it attracted a variety of speakers with different solutions.

The central practical question that emerged from the moratorium was whether a demonstration of magnitude and diversity would lead to a change in the nation's Vietnam policy. The moratorium's leaders said it would. The answer from the White House—which suddenly adopted a studied nonchalance about the whole thing—was that business, including the serious business of winding down the war on Mr. Nixon's own schedule and according to the dictates of his private conscience, would proceed much as usual.

During and after the moratorium, Mr. Nixon conferred with his advisers on Vietnam, worked on his Latin American policy, listened to an urban affairs sub-

committee report on education, appointed a new chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and hinted that his efforts to curb inflation were bearing fruit. Whenever anyone asked the White House for its response to the moratorium, Mr. Nixon's Press Secretary, Ronald Ziegler, would refer the questioner to Mr. Nixon's letter Monday to a Georgetown University student. In the letter the President repeated both his desire for peace and his belief that "There is nothing new we can learn from the demonstrations."

Despite the President's studied unconcern, however, the moratorium did not go unnoticed in the White House and it was by no means certain that, in the end, it would not force at least some tactical revisions in Mr. Nixon's policy.

Wide Diversity

The moratorium's most impressive characteristic was not its size but its diversity. There is no clear way of measuring the numbers who marched, talked, listened or simply excused themselves from work on Wednesday—estimates ranged from "at least" a million to "several millions."

Washington lawyers congregated in a famous old church to hear Arthur Goldberg urge an immediate cease-fire without "imposing conditions of our own"; students at the University of Kansas sang songs of protest and held "peace seminars"; ordinary citizens of New York massed in Bryant Park to hear Senator Eugene McCarthy say they were engaged in "a kind of moral testament"; housewives, city officials, and clergymen rallied for peace in Duluth, and the wife of the acting president of Mr. Nixon's alma mater, Whittier College, lit a butane "flame of life" to serve as "a constant reminder of those who have died and are dying" in Vietnam.

Equally indisputable was the fact that millions did not participate. If it was difficult to calibrate the level of dissent against the President's policies, it was virtually impossible even to make an educated guess at the size of the residual support for the President's policies.

Nixon's Support

But support was clearly visible, not only in the angry cries of the fraternal and veterans' organizations, but also in the conspicuous absence from the demonstrations of many blue-collar workers and in the testimonials of support from public and private figures. Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, for one, coupled a plea for continued withdrawals of troops with a renewed pledge to support the President's basic objectives; former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, who helped turn Lyndon Johnson around on the war, asserted that a gradual withdrawal geared to "Vietnamization" represented the only honorable course, and Samuel P. Huntington, a Harvard professor, voiced fear that "the moratorium has reduced virtually to zero the possibility of a negotiated settlement; Hanoi obviously will not accept compromise if it thinks the American people will give them victory."

How deeply the White House will be influenced remains at this point an open question. In any case Mr. Nixon will ultimately have to weigh the pressure generated by the demonstrators against the other pressures upon him, including the forces converging on him from Paris, Saigon and his advisers. Paris is telling him that the prospects for a negotiated settlement are dim. Yet his advisers here are full of fresh and optimistic reports from the battlefield, and are telling him that if he will hew to his policy of gradual withdrawal geared to "Vietnamization" it will, in time, bear fruit. And the fearful rulers of Saigon are, of course, pleading with him to stand fast.

But of all the pressures on Mr. Nixon, the strongest are

those that flow from his own conscience. While the demonstrators say they are appealing to the President's conscience, the fact remains that his reading of the stakes in Vietnam are quite different from theirs and his concern for the "human and international" consequences of a precipitous withdrawal is a genuine concern.

This, really, is the sticking point. Many of the demonstrators have dismissed the President's efforts to reduce casualties, withdraw troops, quicken "Vietnamization," and lower draft calls as cynical and trivial efforts to purchase public support; Mr. Nixon sees them as substantive maneuvers in a final, valiant effort to entice the enemy into an "honorable" truce.

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