Back to Article Click to Print

TIME
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CNN

Friday, Oct. 17, 1969

STRIKE AGAINST THE WAR

MORATORIUM" was scarcely a household word a couple of months ago. The dictionary definition is "a period of permissive or obligatory delay," and to most people it meant a pause in paying one's debts or in talking. Now, suddenly, "moratorium" has become the focus of national attention in its special 1969 sense: M-day, Oct. 15, a movement intended by its organizers and supporters to show the Nixon Administration that large and growing numbers of Americans want out of the Viet Nam war as fast as possible.

Across the nation, M-day observances are aimed at suspending business-as-usual in order to allow protest, debat and thought about the war. The Moratorium demonstrates a diversity and spread unknown in the earlier landmark protests against the war: the march on the Pentagon in October 1967, which inspired Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night, and the bloody riots the following summer in Mayor Daley's Chicago. Each of those involved directly only a minority of the young and the radical intelligentsia, not anything resembling a cross-section of U.S. society.

M-day is different. In Brunswick, Me., 1,000 candles were to be left burning atop the Senior Center, the tallest building in northern New England. In Washington, 16 Representatives announced that they would keep the House in all-night session in order to speak against the war. In North Newton, Kans., an antique bell long disuse was to be tolled some 40,000 times for the U.S. dead in Viet Nam. In the conservative city of Los Alamos, N. Mex housewives agreed to block a bridge leading to local defense plants while carrying signs: HELP STOP THE WAR. Students from Gonzaga University and Whitworth College organized a march to the federal building in Spokane, Wash., where they would wear white armbands speckled with blood.

Letting Nixon Know

Small-town housewives and Wall Street lawyers, college presidents and politicians, veteran demonstrators and people who have never made the "V" sign of the peace movement—thousands of Americans who have never

thought to grow a beard, don a hippie headband or burn a draft card—planned to turn out on M-day to register their dismay and frustration over Viet Nam. Yes terday's Vietniks are determined to grow into tomorrow's majority.

The core of M-day activism is on the campuses, as it was in the campaign for Eugene McCarthy in 1968; hundreds of colleges and universities are closing for the day or radically altering schedules to allow for Moratorium demonstrations. The idea has spread from the campuses to the community at large—though not without arousing resistance. In the affluent suburb of Westport, Conn., the representative town meeting bitterly debated for nearly three hours last week and then only narrowly passed, 17 to 15, a resolution asking immediate action to get the U.S. out of Viet Nam. In California's San Joaquin Valley, the Porterville police chief denied local residents permission to march down the customary Main Street route on their peace parade this week; the city council backed him up, and the protesters had to settle for a route around the edge of town.

No Allegiance to Mao

What did support for the Moratorium mean? Did it mean backing unconditional withdrawal from Viet Nam? Many of the Moratorium's supporters favored it, but many more did not. Almost certainly the majority of the nation as a whole was not prepared for that step at present.

Within the diversity of M-day protest was one unifying factor: exhaustion of patience with the war, doubt about the pace of Richard Nixon's efforts to end it. Some participants had specific ideas on how to end the war. A five-point proposal came last week from Yale's President Kingman Brewster Jr. and New Haven Mayor Richard Lee, who jointly called for an immediate cease-fire followed within twelve months by withdrawal of all U.S. forces; elections supervised by "a coalition body" dominated by neither side; aid to any South Vietnamese wishing to leave his country; and U.S. economic assistance for rebuilding Viet Nam.

Other protesters, however, were merely obeying their emotions, without any concrete idea of what they wanted the U.S. to do. They would agree with Mrs. Eleanor Bockman, a middle-aged Atlanta housewife: "I think people are thoroughly tired of the war. I think that some middle-class whites are just beginning to realize the depth of poverty in this country. Older people see the emptiness, the burden of the war. Younger people see it as a great waste of talent and life. Everybody knows that there is no answer now to the Viet Nam war, but we've got to let Nixon know."

The M-day movement has been getting bigger partly because its leaders — who happily confessed that the Moratorium had begun to run them, not they the Moratorium — cast as wide a net as possible. They appealed to al most anyone unhappy with the war, shunning extremists and avoiding ideo logical factionalism. The absence of New Left infighting and cant was refreshing.

One Columbia student confessed: "It will be nice to go to a demonstration without having to swear allegiance to Chairman Mao."

An Element of Coercion

One large segment of M-day support comes from those who worked for Mc Carthy or Robert Kennedy last year be cause of their opposition to the war.

But there were significant differences.

For one thing, Lyndon Johnson's down fall showed once again how an en trenched President could be defeated over a deeply emotional issue. For another, Richard Nixon's own obvious determination to end the war, regardless of his timetable, had made opposition to the war far more respectable. To many people, the argument is no longer really over victory or defeat, patriotism or dishonor, but rather over when the U.S. withdraws and what concessions, if any, it can get in return. Timing, of course, could make a major difference to the U.S.'s future position in Asia — but it is not a difference for which many people are eager to sacrifice lives or money.

Democratic Congressman Allard Lowenstein of New York, a leader of last year's dump-Johnson movement and this year's M-day program, puts his case starkly: "This government, God willing, will respond to the wishes of the people, not to a tiny blackmailing minority that is trying to extort something, but to the massive wishes of people who have a right to express their views." Yet there is an inevitable element of coercion. The protest's sponsors plan monthly moratoriums, with each round to be a day longer than the previous one. If that plan works—a doubtful proposition—its impact could be immense.

Once again it was the "children's crusade" that led the way: it was the students who spread the M-day idea. But the original Moratorium concept came in fact from Jerome Grossman, 52, a Massachusetts envelope manufacturer long active in the peace movement. He talked the idea over with Sam Brown Jr., 26, an lowan and former Harvard Divinity School student whom he knew from the McCarthy campaign. Brown persuaded Grossman that the businessman's first idea—a general strike on the traditional European model that would seek to stop the wheels of commerce entirely—was probably too audacious to succeed. Brown's instinct was that a quiet day of discussion and debate carried beyond the campus might well catch on.

The Viet Nam Moratorium Committee was organized by them late in the spring, but the plan was deliberately held back. Early in June, Nixon ordered the first withdrawal of 25,000 troops from Viet Nam and promised more, a step that bought him time with many of the nation's more moderate critics of the war. Later, Brown put off (he Moratorium, from September to October, for two tactical reasons: he wanted the peace movement's student nucleus back on campus, and he wanted more time for discontent to develop over the cautious pace of Nixon's moves. "It's been critical to wait nine months for Nixon to do something," says Grossman.

The techniques of the M-day organization are the same as those of the New Politics of 1968: to speak with a moderate yet deeply committed voice, to work through zealous grass-roots volunteers (armed with lists of sympathizers from last year's campaigns), to force the issue of the war to the forefront of American consciousness through a mixture of informal discussion and dramatic gesture. Many of the leaders of the Moratorium Committee were among the McCarthy and R.F.K. braintrusters: Brown; Adam Walinsky, 32, one of Kennedy's most insistently antiwar aides; and Congressman Lowenstein, 40.

In the cluttered national headquarters on Washington's Vermont Avenue, there is the cheerful, youthful bustle reminiscent of the "Clean for Gene" New Hampshire primary campaign. One wall bears a placard: "When we lasted long enough, they gave us medals. When we died, they said our casualties were low."

Telephones ring constantly as volunteers sort out and fill requests for M-day speakers. Their dedication is awesome.

Supporters at Yale, for example, planned to spend the first two days this week telephoning everyone in the 380-page New Haven directory urging at tendance at a mass rally.

A Matter of Fashion

As the Moratorium idea mushroomed, some politicians hustled to get on the bandwagon and others less sympathetic found themselves hesitating to criticize the burgeoning movement. Businessmen and school boards wrestled with the problem of whether to close for the day, feeling that to shut down would be unfair to workers and students who support the war or do not wish to participate in M-day. The question was:

Should institutions themselves take a stand?

Seymour Martin Lipset, a Harvard professor and a foe of the war, thought not.* He put his case with vigor: "As much as I want us to do everything as individuals, as members of the Harvard faculty and citizens of this country to point out to our Government how much we detest the war and what we want done about it, I cannot bring myself to feel that we should turn on what has been a basic aspect of academic freedom and political liberty—that universities qua universities do not take political stands." On many campuses, support for the Moratorium became a matter of fashion and conformity; opposition to it could only invite scorn.

The momentum of dissent was clearly building. In June, just after the Midway troop-withdrawal announcement, Nixon's handling of the war was narrowly approved in a Louis Harris sampling, 47% to 45%. In mid-September, it was rejected in a Harris poll, 57% to 35%. Six Viet Nam experts at Santa Monica's Rand Corp., which started as an Air Force-financed research facility and still depends heavily on Pentagon contracts, wrote the New York Times last week to demand unilateral withdrawal by the U.S. (but four of their colleagues, equally expert, disagreed in a

letter to the Washington Post). Making common cause with their students, the presidents of 79 U.S. colleges and universities signed a joint statement calling for an accelerated U.S. pull-out from Viet Nam. M-day has ecumenical support among religious leaders. Boston's Richard Cardinal Gushing endorsed the Moratorium; so have the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Rabbi Jacob Rudin, president of the Synagogue Council of America.

The Johnson Parallel

Nixon was getting flak closer to home as well, from 17 Senators and 47 Representatives who announced support for M-day. A raft of critical resolutions surfaced on Capitol Hill, showing defiance of Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott's plea for a moratorium of his own—a 60-day pause in attacks on Nixon's war policies. Two freshman Democratic Senators, Iowa's Harold Hughes and Missouri's Thomas Eagleton, demanded extensive reform of the Saigon government —within 60 days. Idaho's Frank Church and Oregon's Mark Hatfield asked for "a more rapid withdrawal of American troops"; George McGovern wanted an immediate pullout. On the House side, a vague resolution in support of eventual disengagement drew 109 cosponsors. But liberal Republicans Donald Riegle Jr. of Michigan and Paul McCloskey Jr. of California produced something stronger: a proposal to repeal, effective at the end of 1970, the 1964 Tonkin Gulf resolution under which President Johnson proceeded to bomb North Viet Nam and build the U.S. troop level in South Viet Nam past the half-million mark. None of the flat antiwar resolutions have a chance of passing, but their sponsors obviously feel that the measures are what their constituents want.

Nixon's first reaction to the M-day plans was disdainful. At a press conference Sept. 26, he said of the Moratorium: "Under no circumstances will I be affected whatever by it." That was a serious mistake: he outraged many who might otherwise have sat on their hands. "It is now a challenge to show this Administration the outpouring of voter protest," declared Eugene Weisberg, a Denver industrialist and lifelong Republican. Reports Harold Willens, Western-states chairman of the Business Executives Move for Viet Nam Peace: "In the last two weeks, businessmen are suddenly ready to give money, and to do whatever they can. Somehow, deep down, Americans are beginning to realize that Richard Nixon is Lyndon Johnson." Nixon is not, of course, but some of his critics feel that Nixon's apparent disregard for public feeling on Viet Nam may come to parallel Johnson's own.

In spite of Nixon's disdainful public view of M-day, there were clear signs of dismay and confusion around the White House and among those who believe that any President deserves support in pursuing his foreign policy. Dean Acheson, no stranger to criticism of his own foreign policy when he was Harry Truman's Secretary of State, weighed in with the observation that open season on Presidents should be limited to "the quadrennial donnybrook," an Achesonism for presidential elections. Henry Kissinger, the President's chief foreign affairs strategist, told a group of visiting Quakers that the Moratorium is "counterproductive" because it comes at a time when the North Vietnamese are shaping their post-Ho policies. Vice President Spiro Agnew discreetly withdrew from an Oct. 15 New Jersey political dinner to avoid becoming a target for protesters. The Vice President denounced M-day as "absurd." Almost simultaneously, Republican National Chairman Rogers C.B. Morton was

calling the Moratorium "a good thing," provided that it remained nonviolent.

One Administration effort to defuse M-day succeeded another. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird confirmed publicly what had already been reported (TIME, July 25): that U.S. commanders in Viet Nam no longer have orders to keep up "maximum pressure" on the enemy. He also announced that "Vietnamization" of the war was proceeding at full speed. In a poignant parallel, Laird's son John, 21, declared that he would march on M-day with his fellow students at Eau Claire State University in Wisconsin.

Said John: "I think everybody should be against the war. It's gotten a little out of hand."

The White House let it be known that Nixon was conferring on Viet Nam with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Joint Chiefs Chairman Earle Wheeler and Laird, and had summoned Henry Cabot Lodge, chief U.S. negotiator at the Paris talks, home for consultations this week (see story, page 23). Lieut. General Lewis Hershey, 76, head of Selective Service for 28 years and a symbol of the draft's caprices and inequities, suddenly found himself relieved of his post and shunted into a job as a presidential manpower consultant, effective next February.* Professor Hubert Humphrey of the University of Minnesota showed up at the White House to endorse Nixon's efforts to find peace in Viet Nam. Humphrey planned to hold classes on M-day, but planned to lead his students in a discussion of the war. "The American people are not going to be hushed," he said, alluding to Hugh Scott's brand of moratorium.

Just how much effect the efforts to defuse dissent would ultimately have remained to be seen. Certainly there were still vast numbers of Americans who supported the President's policy and who were prepared either to ignore or to oppose the Moratorium.

Unsigned Flyers

With a conformity on the issue as tight as that of the Harvard faculty, A.F.L.-C.I.O. delegates in Atlantic City last week voted 999 to 1 to back Nixon on Viet Nam. A Young Americans for Freedom leader in Honolulu went to court last week to seek an order compelling the University of Hawaii to show cause why it should not remain open on M-day; a group called Undergraduates for a Stable America took ads in the Daily Princetonian urging students to attend classes during the Moratorium. Faculty members at Wheaton College in Norton, Mass., found unsigned flyers in their mailboxes demanding: "Defend the aims of your college; support your Government's efforts for a just peace; hold and attend classes Oct. 15."

Stanley Buturlia, 48, a North Andover, Mass., machine-shop supervisor who has a son in Viet Nam, has his own reasons for opposing M-day. "If World War II had the television coverage that this war is getting," he argues, "the boys wouldn't have wanted to go. We can't pull out. There's too much involved. Leave the war the way it is. Keep the Communists thinking. Maybe it won't hurt us or my kid's generation; but if we pull out, it would hurt my kid's

kids." Less reasonably, Chairman Richard Ichord of the House Internal Security Committee damned the Moratorium as "a propaganda ma neuver designed and organized by Communists." (Law-enforcement officers say that the M-day movement is remarkably free from any such influences.)

The main support for the Moratorium came from the Northeast and the West Coast, where antiwar feeling has always been strongest. But plenty of action was in train in the South and Midwest as well, in small towns and at obscure colleges that have never seen a peace demonstration before.

In Washington, congressional staff members planned a noontime vigil on the Capitol steps; employees of more than 20 federal agencies planned ceremonies at their offices. Senator Frank Church of Idaho was scheduled to address a Peace Corps rally, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota to appear at an American University teach-in. Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. planned to lead a candlelight procession from the Washington Monument to the White House gates.

More than 150 years ago, the Hartford Convention proposed returning defense responsibilities to the separate states in protest against the War of 1812; New England is now in the vanguard of M-day. Boston lawyers decided to meet in historic Faneuil Hall, and then stand by, wearing green arm bands, to provide on-the-spot legal assistance if needed at an afternoon rally on Boston Common. Republican Governor Francis Sargent, who says of Viet Nam that "the want-to-get-out sentiment has grown rapidly," was to address a peace rally on the town green in suburban Lexington, where the first shot of the Revolutionary War was fired.

Maine's Democratic Governor Kenneth Curtis backed the Moratorium, and senses among down-Easters "a more dovish position than existed before." Hampshiremen, by dialing 603 271-3535, could hear a tape of their Republican Governor, Walter Peterson, advising that "Oct. 15 can be a day of mature reflection on the proper leadership goals of a great nation." Vermonters were in for a bipartisan treat. Democratic ex-Governor Philip Hoff, an early McCarthy backer, and conservative Republican Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hayes agreed to speak at a rally—in the Bennington National Guard Armory. Following that: a candlelight march to the obelisk that commemorates the Battle of Bennington in 1777.

In New York, Senator McCarthy was due at a rally behind the public library; in an extraordinary gesture, Mayor John Lindsay, running desperately for reelection, ordered all city flags flown at half-staff beginning at noon. At Wall Street's Trinity Church, the names of war dead were to be read by a large cast of unusual protesters, including Publisher Bill Moyers, once L.B.J.'s press secretary; Lawyer Roswell Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense under Robert McNamara; and Banker J. Sinclair Armstrong, an Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Eisenhower Administration. Children in the New York City public schools were allowed to stay home if they chose to take part in the Moratorium. In certain cases, the protest movement assumed ludicrous proportions: the West Side Montessori nursery school in Manhattan announced that it would close for the day to join the protest.

Better Than a Riot

On the West Coast, near Los Angeles, the mayor and city council of middle-income Thousand Oaks unanimously declared Oct. 15 to be "a day of community effort for peace"; the University of Southern California, long one of the most protest-proof of universities, has taken the lead in the area's M-day movement; Harry Evans, a Western-region official of the United Automobile Workers, insists that "my contacts with the workers in our union convince me that the majority of workmgmen today want us to get the hell out of Viet Nam." Six months ago, he admits, that was not so. Now, "some think there has been just too much killing and they want it stopped," he says. "Others have kids that will be eligible for the draft pretty soon."

The biggest Los Angeles rally was planned for U.S.C., with Black Leader Ralph Abernathy, the U.A.W.'s Paul Schrade and Senator Alan Cranston as speakers. Women Strike for Peace organized a vigil at the veterans' cemetery in West Los Angeles. At suburban Whittier College, Richard Nixon's alma mater, there were to be no classes during the M-day campus rally. A Canoga Park housewife, Mrs. Diane Steffin, finds M-day a happy outlet for the antiwar feelings she has had since 1965. "Until now," she says, "there didn't seem to be any way short of going to college and joining in a riot." In Northern California, Berkeley emerged as the biggest center of protest; however, groups other than the familiar hot-eyed types long associated with campus unrest became involved this time. An organiza tional meeting last week on campus turned out a preponderance of "dormies" and "Greeks" not normally on the side of activism. Late last month the Berkeley city council, usually bitterly opposed to student-led causes, voted 5 to 1 to back M-day in principle.

Antiwar sentiment was not nearly so pronounced in the Midwest. In Chicago, TIME Correspondent Sam Iker stopped 16 people at random in the street, and discovered that just two had some idea of what the Moratorium was about. The only Chicago businesses that planned to close were nine art galleries. One reason for this heartland attitude may be last week's disruptive outbursts in Chicago by the extremist "Weatherman" faction of the S.D.S. (see story, page 24), which led to head-busting that in the Midwest eclipsed publicity for the nonviolent M-day protest. Still, even here, support for the Moratorium seemed to be shaping up with more force than there had been any reason to expect. Gordon Sherman, head of Midas-International (auto parts and mobile homes) and chairman of Chicago's chapter of the Business Executives Move for Viet Nam Peace, encouraged employees to take part in M-day; his group planned a silent hour-long vigil of executives, heads bowed, at Chicago's civic center. Girls from Barat College of the Sacred Heart, a small Catholic school, agreed to pass out antiwar leaflets on Chicago commuter trains.

Crumbling Promise

The often bellicose South was shifting —not to outright opposition, but to a growing feeling of frustration. Henry Bass, who used to head the Atlanta Workshop in Nonviolence, found "a new element" among today's Southern critics of the war. "People who had faith in Nixon, who thought he might be able to end the war in six months, are waiting and wondering," he said. "There is no hope for peace in 1969 or 1970, and the thought of the war not

ending until 1971 is just more than people can take." Miami Beach Banker Jack Gordon argued that M-day "may be the last opportunity that business and professional people will have to voice a protest against the war." If the Moratorium is unsuccessful, he felt, the young and militant will turn to violent uprisings that will rouse middle-class revulsion.

In Houston, businessmen have been especially active in stirring pro-peace feelings and, like many others, Lawyer Bill Ballew gave the kids the credit. "Many parents have been won over by the dialogue with their collegiate children who supported McCarthy," he said. "For many, it finally dawned on them that we couldn't win. The promise of victory crumbled."

Obviously a great deal of the Moratorium agitation was emotional, even sentimental, and amateurish. Partly for those reasons, it was violently attacked by some radicals who reject the strategy of nonviolent effort within the established U.S. system. Myron Mather, Harvard senior and S.D.S. activist, dismissed the protest as irrelevant: "All those McCarthy jackasses will just be indulging in their patriotic, onanistic impulses. There isn't one of them who knows anything about Realpolitik."

To practitioners of Realpolitik in the Nixon Administration, the peace movement is just as infuriating, if for different reasons. They bear the enormous responsibility of liquidating an increasingly obvious mistake not of their making; they must be concerned about the consequences of a U.S. withdrawal from Viet Nam elsewhere in Asia and throughout the world; they must remember the fact that the U.S. has global responsibilities that cannot be torn up like a draft card. To Richard Nixon, the M-day protest must seem especially unfair. He has tried hard to settle the war, and he worked out a plan of de-escalation that earlier—say, in the last phase of the Johnson Administration—would have satisfied many war critics. He has at least succeeded in scaling down the war. Some troops have been withdrawn, the draft has been reduced and casualties have been drastically cut. Last week's report was of 64 U.S. dead, the lowest number in nearly three years. He has tried to stir Hanoi and the "provisional revolution ary government" into active negotiations at Paris, only to find no break in the stone wall of Communist intransigence. Yet the disenchantment that M-day incarnates is a political reality, and it is partly of his own making. He campaigned on the promise that he had a plan to end the war, a promise that contributed to his narrow victory. Once it became clear that under the inevitable ground rules the U.S. was incapable of winning a military victory in Viet Nam —a fact that Nixon has admitted—the North in effect lost all incentive to go for a compromise. Thus, Nixon now seems to have raised false hopes, and this week's Moratorium may be only the beginning of the price he must pay for doing so. The specific impact of the Moratorium will not be known for some time, but plainly Nixon cannot escape the effects of the antiwar movement. Unless he can assert new leadership and rally much of the nation in some unforeseen way, Nixon's timetable for a withdrawal from Viet Nam will surely have to be speeded up.

* Cambridge legend has it that the last time the Harvard faculty officially passed a collective political judgment was in 1773, when they agreed to stop drinking tea in protest against George Ill's tax. While no one at last week's faculty meeting spoke in favor of the war, record numbers of faculty turned out to debate the propriety of taking a formal stand against it. The vote to condemn the war was

affirmative, 255 to 81, with 150 abstentions. *Only three days before, a bomb shattered windows and dislodged masonry in New York City's major armed-forces induction center at 39 Whitehall Street. There were no injuries.

Click to Print

Find this article at:
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,840217,00.html