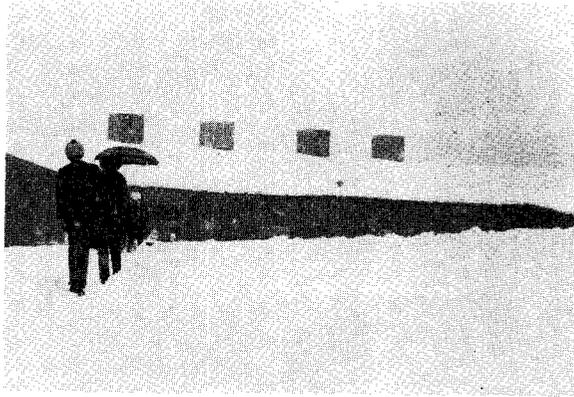
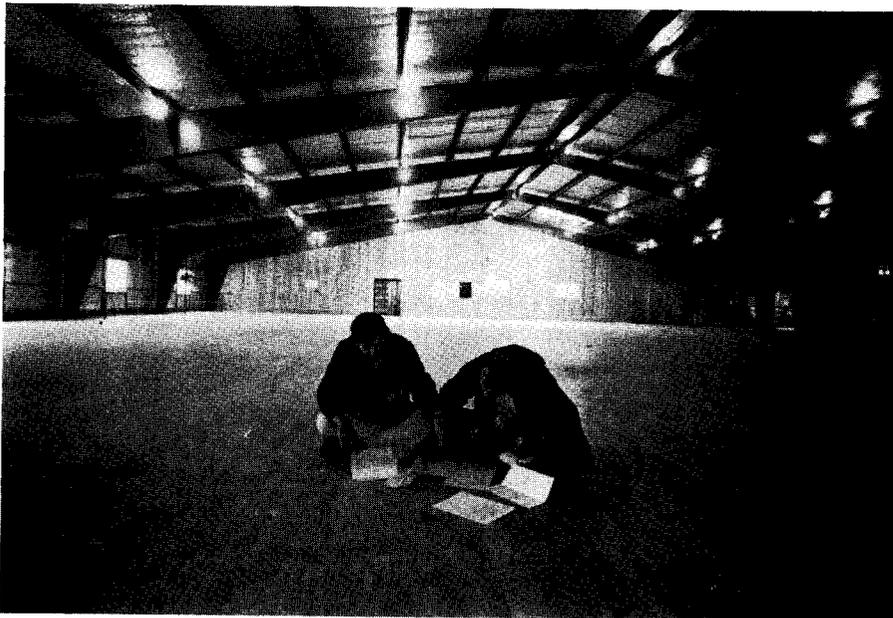


by BONNIE BARRETT STRETCH



The White House Conference on Youth



—Photos by Bob Krueger

Life at the conference—Snowbound, the delegates worked grimly in isolated groups until the final plenary session when “a joyous sense of oneness burst through.”

As the 1,500 delegates to the White House Conference on Youth piled out of the buses into the thin gray air of Estes Park, Colorado, there was an unmistakable sense of recognition: They had been sent away to camp. Warily, they eyed the “log cabin” bungalows spread out against the vast empty mountainside and stumbled over heaps of luggage to get to the lines for room assignments, meal tickets, and meeting schedules. They were in the YMCA of the Rockies—a huge resort and conference camp scattered on the eastern slope of the Continental Divide, two hours north of Denver, and miles away from anywhere.

It was an open secret that the conference—of 1,000 young people (aged fourteen to twenty-four) and 500 adults—was being held in this remote spot to cut down on publicity, to discourage uninvited guests, and to keep enthusiastic delegates out of the hair of the Washington power structure. (“If we were in Washington,” declared one member of the poverty task force impatiently, “we could go right over and talk to Mills.”) The official rationale—that it would allow the adult members who represented the “decision-makers” to concentrate their whole attention on the voices of youth without political, business, or other distractions—was convincing to only a few.

The mood of the nation’s youth in spring 1971 is one of suspicion and cynicism, and this conference suffered as much from that fact as from any other. It was easy to listen to and believe the stories of political manipulation in the picking of delegates, the structure of the conference, and the selection of the site.

Officially the delegates represented a Cross Section of American Youth: 16 per cent in college, 39 per cent in high school, 39 per cent working or looking for work, 6 per cent in the armed forces—not to mention the racial, religious, and population percentages for each region of the country. This demographic profile, National Chairman Stephen Hess declared frequently, “would dramatically illustrate the youth population is not monolithic.”

Unofficially, the grumbling went, it meant that the young people were carefully picked, that the demographic categories served not only to achieve a fair composite group, but also to exclude the more militant activists. It seemed a fair assumption that President Nixon would be pleased if this “non-monolithic” group produced a majority that endorsed his policies.

Who was doing the grumbling? There was a small group of outsiders, to be

sure. But the mainstream of discontent came from the most hand-picked group of all—the original 120 task force members who drew up the ten task force advisory reports. These were the brightest youths, the biggest achievers, chosen, as one staff member put it, because they were “activists in their field.” There was the eighteen-year-old high school student from Texas who organized a state movement for better care for delinquent youths; the sixteen-year-old member of the Environmental Quality Improvement Association; the ex-drug addict who started a rehabilitation center; the former gang leader who launched a major self-help community organization; the college senior on leave to the Women’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor to help promote women’s rights and opportuni-

ties on campuses. These were young people still working within the system but very much alive and alert to the work that needs to be done. They had spent eight months working on advisory reports that ranged from poor to surprisingly tough, and they had also learned a bit about Washington-style politics. What you heard about Hess and his staff depended on who you talked to. Some found them helpful and cooperative; others, political and defensive.

By the time the task force members and the other delegates arrived at Estes Park, the mood was at best one of skepticism. Who would be listening to them way out here, and what difference would it make, in any case? Hess announced that the adult delegates, there to “dialogue” with youth, represented

“power,” the policy-makers in business and government. Few of the adults cared to answer to this description, however. Certainly the voices of authority that attract youth were not there—the Ralph Naders, the Allard Lowensteins, the Ralph Abernathys. They were specifically not asked, according to Hess, so that the conference could avoid the celebrity system and concentrate on the work at hand.

HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson showed up the first night, however, and promised to listen and respond to what youth had to say. “Some of your suggestions we will agree with completely, others we will agree with in part, some we will not agree with at all, and for these you will deserve to know why.”

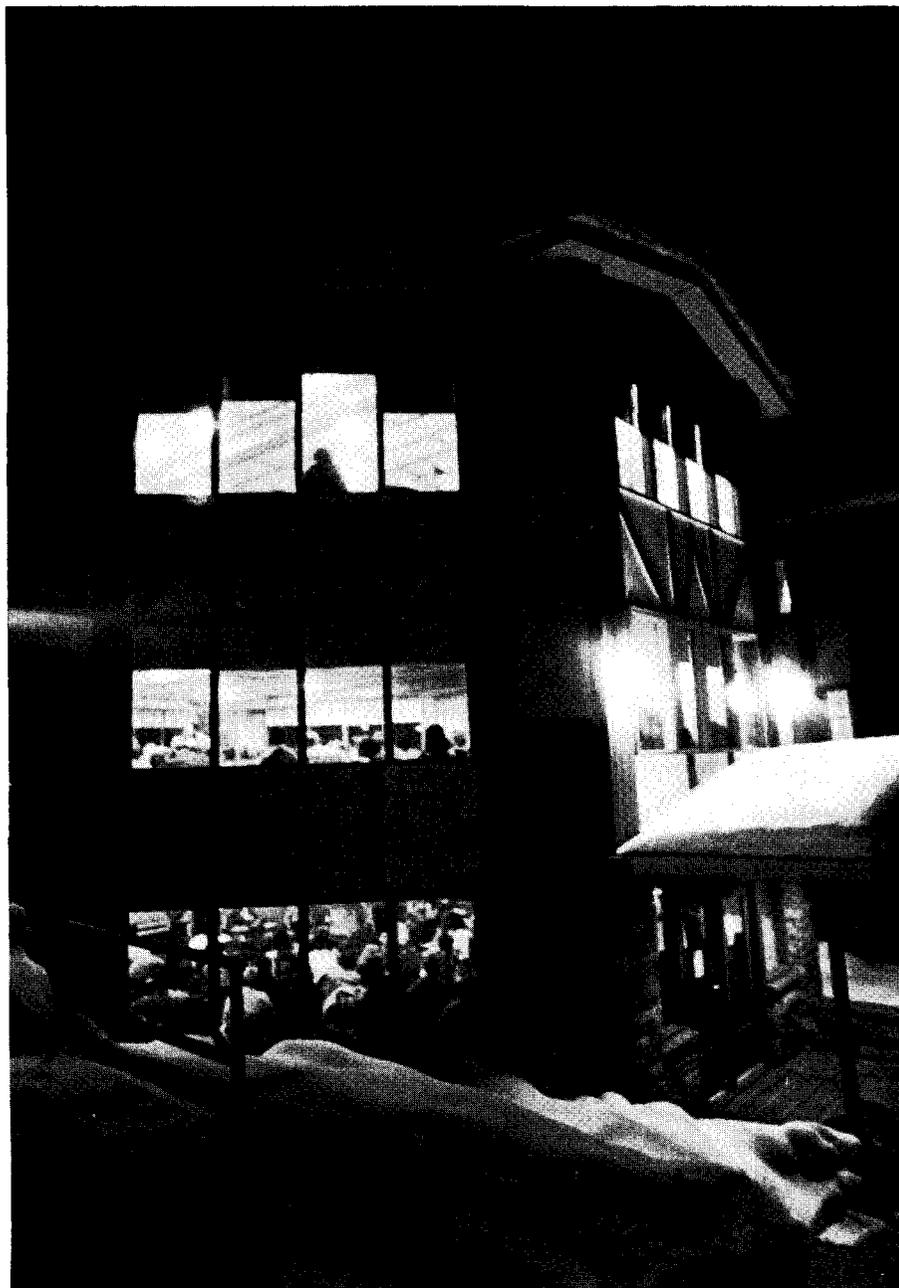
A handful of radical-type interlopers tried to take over the opening plenary session to demand a new approach to “implementation” but found that they had been outflanked by Hess, who had anticipated and already acceded to their move. Their clumsy takeover was quickly hooted down by the audience of delegates. Other delegates rose to announce the formation of minority group caucuses. One read a letter to the conference from Thuynh-tan Mam, president of the Vietnam National Student Union, calling for the withdrawal of American troops, for peace, and for the right to struggle for their own independence. It was greeted by a standing ovation. Another delegate denounced the foreign relations task force for ignoring Israel and Soviet Jewry. Finally, someone denounced the formation of splinter interest-groups and called for togetherness. “The air in these mountains is too damned thin for fighting!”

With that, the plenary broke up and everyone stumbled out of the Long House into the night looking for his bungalow, his task force, his place to be.

A foot of snow had fallen by the next morning, and the steady gray blanket sealed off the mountain vistas and any sense of contact with the outside world. A few people, disgusted, packed and left. Most stayed and, since there was nothing else to do, repressed the sense of futility and settled down to work. The mood shifted to one of determination to get the job done, and the job consisted mainly of reworking the advisory task force. To do this, the task forces divided into workshops and sub-workshops.

For the next two days, small clusters of youth and adult delegates scatter into various corners of buildings and cabins, sit grim-faced over their white task force papers, and earnestly debate the pros and cons of their eighty or so

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Three task forces at work in marathon sessions—“There is a lot of voting, balloting, lobbying, making points of order, and moving the previous question.”

Schools Make News



—Wide World

“Desegregation plans cannot be limited to the walk-in school,” the Court declared.

Green Light for Busing

BUSING HAS BEEN an explosive issue in both the North and South, inflaming otherwise passive citizens to violence. Many parents have protested and have kept their children home rather than see them bused to ghetto schools; and last year the nation was stunned when angry whites in Lamar, South Carolina, overturned a school bus carrying Negro children to their newly desegregated school. President Nixon himself has come out in favor of neighborhood schools, even if it means retarding the integration process. In a policy statement in March 1970, he said that busing “beyond normal geographical school zones for the purpose of achieving racial balance will not be required.”

But last month, overriding the administration, the Supreme Court—with all nine Justices concurring—ruled that busing to get rid of “the last vestiges of state-imposed segregation” was Constitutional. In a series of decisions, written by Chief Justice Warren Burger, the Court declared that almost any device, including extensive rezoning and “bizarre” remedies, would be considered permissible to achieve unitary school systems within once segregated cities.

Most of the new guidelines are contained in the opinion upholding the federal district court plan that requires massive busing for Charlotte and surrounding Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The controversial Charlotte plan was developed by Judge James B. McMillan after the school board, having been urged three times to submit suitable desegregation plans,

failed to do so. The plan called for cross-town busing to achieve in each elementary school the ratio of 71 per cent whites and 29 per cent blacks, the mix existing within the entire system.

“Desegregation plans cannot be limited to the walk-in school,” wrote Justice Burger. Busing is a legitimate tool of school desegregation, he asserted, and cautioned lower courts only to avoid busing plans with such long trips that might “either risk the health of the children or significantly impinge on the educational process.” Burger underscored the point that busing has been part of the system for years. Busing has been widely used in the South, but for the express purpose of maintaining segregation. In Charlotte, for example, Burger noted that some 23,600 children of all ages had been bused for an average one-way trip of more than an hour. Under the new district court plan, the average trip was “not over thirty-five minutes at most.”

In addition to busing, the Court said, “frank—and sometimes drastic—gerrymandering of school districts and attendance zones” was necessary, even to the extent of pairing one district with another across town to achieve a better racial balance within a city. “All things being equal, with no history of discrimination,” wrote Burger, “it might well be desirable to assign pupils to schools nearest their homes. But all things are not equal in a system that has been deliberately constructed and maintained to enforce racial segregation.”

In other rulings, the Court declared that Athens, Georgia, must assign pupils to schools by race to break up the

status quo, and called for more busing in a Mobile, Alabama, plan that integrated the schools on the fringes of Mobile’s large black core but that left more than half of the city’s Negro elementary school children in all-black, inner-city schools.

In its decisions, the Supreme Court left broad discretion to the federal district courts. It did not require busing to create the same racial balance in all schools, nor did it require the elimination of every all-black school within a district. But the rulings do mean that virtually every city in the South will be ordered to commence some form of busing, and some may be told to aim for the Charlotte-type “ratio” solution.

For the South, this means another uncertain summer of angry litigations, just when many had felt that the battle over desegregation had peaked. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, a leader in the successful suits in Charlotte and Mobile, says that it will now take legal action for new integration programs in some forty-nine Southern cities—in Atlanta, where the schools are 70 per cent black; in Memphis, where 90 per cent of the black pupils are in all-Negro schools; and in Houston, Little Rock, and Tampa.

With the South subject to wholesale busing, the inequity of letting de facto segregation go untouched in the North became even more glaring. In fact, recent government figures show that the South is now more racially integrated than the North: 39.6 per cent of Southern black children are in schools with a white majority, while only 27.8 per cent of Northern black pupils attend such schools.

The Senate spent the week after the Court’s decision debating the distinctions between Northern- and Southern-type segregation. Senator Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.) introduced a controversial \$20-billion program designed to desegregate metropolitan areas across the country over a twelve-year period. The proposal would require all the schools of any inner city and its suburbs to have a percentage of minority students equal to half the total percentage of the minority students within the entire area. For most places, Ribicoff estimated, this would work out to a minority enrollment of between 10 and 15 per cent.

The program, introduced as an amendment to the \$1.5-billion bill to facilitate Southern desegregation, provoked bitter debate. Senator Ribicoff denounced the “hypocrisy” of his Northern colleagues who were willing to force desegregation down the throat of the South but were themselves unwilling to desegregate. Addressing himself to Senator Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.),