

ON THE SPOT

Talk to Focus on Bonn A-Role

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The centerpiece of the meeting between President Johnson and West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard next week will be the seemingly endless muddle over whether and how the Germans are going to be allowed to share in the West's atomic defense system.

It is reasonably safe to say, however, that not much will be settled and Bonn will again be asked to sit outside the club a little while longer. Even at this late date, with the talks less than 10 days away, the administration still has not decided what its strategy should be.

The State Department's experts are running around with all sorts of plans in their hand, suggesting that the president play the issue up, or down, or somewhere. And

Undersecretary of State George Ball was sent off to London to see what the British think about using their Polaris submarines as a vehicle for accommodating the German desires.

No one seems to be entirely clear yet how Johnson himself would like to play his hand. Officials insist, however, that he is now taking the issue very seriously and will be forthcoming if the Germans are forthcoming. And this is something, considering the fact that only last year he appeared to reject the idea of taking any initiative.

The hard fact, of course, is that the nuclear problem is going to have to be settled sooner or later. The reason is that it is one of the keys to

the solution of the really great issue that dominates the whole future of Europe, the Western Alliance, and the so-called Atlantic Community. And that is how Germany is to be returned to the family of nations as a respectable power pulling its own weight in world councils.

Germany's emergence as the dominant nation in Western Europe, its position as the world's third largest power, is the real driving force behind its demands for greater recognition. This is one of the little discussed but major reasons for French President Charles de Gaulle's obstructionist policies.

Despite the emphasis on Franco-German rapprochement, De Gaulle recognizes

that Germany has pushed well beyond France in real economic power, and it is economic power that usually dictates political power in the end. Nearly everything De Gaulle has done has been designed, directly or indirectly, to contain or even frustrate this power.

The facts, however, speak for themselves. West Germany has a population of 58 million and a gross national product of more than \$103 billion. France has a population of only 48 million and a GNP of only \$87 billion. In the Common Market, which France is trying to intimidate, Germany's position is unchallenged. It accounts for 40 percent of the market's entire output. France's contribution is only 26 percent, and all the other members put together only produce 34 percent.

What is even more significant, perhaps, is that Germany's industrial growth is fast

outpacing France's. For some years now, France has been stumbling along with a growth rate of only about 2 or 3 percent. Germany, on the other hand, has boasted of a rate of between 6 and 8 percent a year, even though the base is much larger.

A quick glance at facts like these helps explain why France has been raising hob in the Common Market, why it is trying to snarl the "Kennedy round" of negotiations on new tariff cuts, and why it balks at NATO nuclear sharing plans. On all counts, the main thrust of its policy is to undercut its supposed new friend and ally.

During the recent German election campaign, Mayor Willy Brandt charged that Germany was an economic giant being treated like a political pygmy. He said it should demand and get greater recognition. Former De-

fense Minister Franz Josef Strauss of the Social Democrats made somewhat the same point.

Erhard and Co. have been less militant than their political foes on the issue. They are, for the most part, senior citizens inclined toward caution, unwilling to collide too openly or violently with De Gaulle. And they shy away from some of the distasteful aspects of great power status, like getting involved in Viet Nam or Cyprus.

But they, too, are now pushing rather insistently for a form of nuclear sharing to certify their power and status in the Western Alliance. They cannot be put off much longer. Whether he wants to or not, Johnson is going to have to assert some leadership to develop a solution, or risk Bonn going into business for itself.