

SENATE APPROVES CONSULAR TREATY WITH SOVIET UNION

First Bilateral Convention
Between Nations Is Voted
With a 3-Vote Margin

RUSSIA STILL MUST ACT

Accord Effective 30 Days
After Exchange of Papers
— President Is Pleased

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 16—The Senate, in the first legislative endorsement of the Administration's East-West "bridge-building" policy, narrowly approved today the consular treaty with the Soviet Union.

The vote was 66 to 28, only three more than the two-thirds majority required for approval of a treaty. Voting for the treaty were 44 Democrats and 22 Republicans; in opposition were 15 Democrats and 13 Republicans.

The convention now goes for formal ratification to President Johnson, who had requested approval of the three-year treaty as a step in his policy of "peaceful engagement" with the Soviet Union and the Communist nations of Eastern Europe.

Signing Date in Doubt

There was no immediate indication whether the President would sign the formal ratification papers before his departure on Saturday to attend a Vietnam strategy conference in Guam.

The convention, the first bilateral treaty between the two nations, has not yet been ratified by the Soviet Union, which has been waiting for the United States to take the lead. It will go into effect 30 days after the two countries exchange instruments of ratification.

Basically, the treaty provides the legal framework for a resumption of consular relations broken off in 1948 following an incident with a Soviet schoolteacher in the Russian consulate in New York City.

Largely because of the opposition it has encountered from conservative groups in the

United States, however, the treaty has assumed a symbolic importance as a test of the willingness of the two nations to move toward more friendly relations despite the Vietnam war.

Big Margin Expected

The Senate approval was regarded as an important foreign policy victory for President Johnson, who in a speech last October and then again in his State of the Union Message urged adoption of the treaty as evidence of the willingness of the United States to "build bridges" to the East. The vote, however, was considerably closer than had been expected by the Administration.

On the basis of the decisive margins by which the Senate beat down a series of restrictive amendments and reservations proposed by conservative Republicans in the eight days of debate, the Administration expected that the treaty might be approved by nearly a 3-to-1 margin. But on the final vote, with nearly the full Senate membership voting, the Administration found its ranks

Continued on Page 20, Column 2 weakened by a few last-minute switches and some absentees.

The treaty was signed in June, 1964, but until this year the Administration and the Senate Democratic leadership hesitated to bring it up for a vote for fear it might be defeated.

When the treaty was reported to the Senate last month, there was still considerable doubt that it would be possible to muster the required two-thirds majority. In the opinion of treaty supporters, the uncertain prospects for the treaty were changed as much by the efforts of certain Republicans as by the lobbying of the Administration.

Political Initiative

Privately, Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was giving much of the credit for the successful outcome to Senator Thruston B. Morton, Republican of Kentucky, who was active behind the scenes in lining up Republican support and in prodding the Administration to take a more active stance in support of the treaty.

It was Senator Morton who took the political initiative in drumming up support for the treaty by warning in a speech Jan. 31 that the treaty would be killed if the White House did not assume a more active role in its support.

Two days later at a White House news conference, President Johnson emphatically urged ratification of the treaty and announced that he had been assured by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that the treaty would present no

espionage problems the F.B.I. could not effectively counter.

This assurance to the President tended to neutralize one of the principal arguments of the opposition, based on earlier statements by Mr. Hoover, that the treaty, by permitting the establishment of Soviet consulates, would promote Soviet espionage.

The opposition then shifted its objections to the argument that it was untimely to make a friendly gesture toward the Soviet Union when Soviet-supplied arms were killing Americans in Vietnam—an argument made today in the final round of debate by Senator Karl E. Mundt, Republican of South Dakota, the leader of the opposition.

The Administration's rebuttal was that the treaty would serve to reduce tensions between the two major nuclear powers and thus indirectly might contribute to a peaceful solution of the Vietnam war. This argument was endorsed today by the two principal Republican spokesmen on foreign policy—Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper of Iowa and the Senate minority leader, Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois.

Reluctant Support

Senator Hickenlooper, who two years ago voted against the treaty in committee, said he was "somewhat reluctantly" supporting it now because he believed it "may contribute, in a small way, to a lessening of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union."

Senator Dirksen, who has been resting in the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, returned to the Senate floor to tell his colleagues he was supporting the treaty as a "small step" toward ameliorating the "fractious ferment" between the two nations.

The final factor that tipped the balance in favor of the treaty, in the opinion of many Senators, was the move by the Senate Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield, at the suggestion of Senator Morton, to replace Senator Fulbright as floor manager during much of the debate. Because of his criticism of Administration Vietnam policy, it was feared that Senator Fulbright could lose several Republican votes if he served as principal defender of the treaty.