

In cavalier fashion the House of Representatives has now joined the Senate in approving an amendment to the military procurement bill that would deal a savage blow at the United Nations and place the United States in flagrant violation of its pledges. The provision would require Washington to breach unilaterally the sanctions twice invoked by the United Nations Security Council against the white racist regime in Rhodesia.

Specifically, the amendment would eliminate as of Jan. 1 the President's authority under the United Nations Participation Act of 1945 to ban importation of Rhodesian chrome so long as imports of that metal from the Soviet Union were allowed. It would have the effect of invalidating the executive orders issued by President Johnson to enforce the Security Council decisions.

Despite the valiant effort by Representative Donald M. Fraser of Minnesota to alert the House to the consequences of its action, there is no evidence that the majority had the faintest idea it was voting in effect to send the U.N. down the ruinous road traveled by the League of Nations when member states unilaterally breached the sanctions it tried to impose on Fascist Italy in 1935.

This result owes much to a well-financed Rhodesian lobby which has exploited shrewdly the racism of Southern Senators and Congressmen, the anti-Communist sentiment on Capitol Hill, the current hostility to the U.N. arising from the expulsion of Taiwan, and the wrath of importers forced to pay inflated prices for Soviet chrome. It was no accident that the Senate champion of white minority rule in Rhodesia was Harry F. Byrd Jr., a relic of the diehard fight for preservation of white domination in Virginia.

Much of the blame rests with the White House, which talked privately with conflicting voices on the issue but made not a single public gesture to sidetrack the amendment. Both Mr. Fraser and Senator Fulbright insisted that the Administration opposed the amendment; but the only evidence was a letter signed by an Assistant Secretary of State. The Republican leaders in the House voted for the amendment.

It is not yet clear whether the bill in final form will leave the President any loophole—if he wants one—for avoiding outright defiance of Security Council resolutions which this country supported. But if Mr. Nixon's inaction on this issue is an example of his Southern strategy it is clear that the price—further erosion of the U.N. and the stigma for the United States of violating the U.N. Charter—is much too high.