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NIXON WILL DEFER ACTION ON CHROME

Signs Bill Defying U.N. Ban
but Awaits Rhodesia Talks

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 17— President Nixon signed legislation today that would effectively terminate the ban the importation of Rhodesian chrome as of Jan. 1.

A resumption of such imports, if it occurs, would violate the five-year-old trade sanctions imposed on Rhodesia by the United Nations Security Council.

The White House said, however, that Nixon would make ever, that Nixon would take no action under the legislation during the current negotiations between Britain and Rhodesia on a settlement to resolve the six-year-old rebellion by the former self-governing colony. The White Government declared its independence unilaterally in 1965 to prevent the black majority from gaining equality.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, told reporters that "in light of the current negotiations, we do not feel it would be helpful for the United States to comment or take any action which might jeopardize a long-term settlement of problems in relation to Rhodesia."

Mr. Ziegler stressed that the legislation did not go into effect until Jan. 1 and that the embargo would remain until then.

A Number of Options

He declined to speculate on what the President might do after that date, but a senior Administration official said privately that the President appeared to have a number of options to discourage violations of the embargo.

Among other possibilities lawyers will examine the feasibility of effectively continuing the ban by blocking imports other Communist countries.

The "back-door approach," as one official termed it, might meet the requirements of the bill, which specifies that the President may not prohibit imports of a strategic material from a non-Communist country if such material is bought from "a Communist dominated country."

The measure took the form of an amendment to the Military Procurement Act of 1971, which the President signed today.

Chrome qualifies as a strategic material because it is an essential ingredient in making a number of steel alloys. At the moment, the United States has a surplus of 1.3 million tons, but private industry imports substantial amounts from the Soviet Union.

The private hope of the White House, officials there indicated, is that the British-Rhodesian negotiations will bear fruit before Jan. 1 and eliminate the need for the United Nations sanctions.

Officials Are Distressed

Nevertheless, many officials are distressed by the dilemma Congress created for the President by attaching the chrome amendment to the procurement bill. They believe the political damage, in terms of the United States' image at the United Nations and its standing with many black African nations, has been done regardless of whether Rhodesian chrome is actually imported.

"It's going to be very hard for us to recoup on this one," a senior State Department official said.

Among other problems, he added, the United States has a treaty obligation to agree to "accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council," which would be clearly violated by a resumption of chrome imports.

The officials maintained that the United States record in enforcing the economic sanctions against Rhodesia had been "second to none."

They noted that the Government had gone to the extreme of taking violating companies to court and that in the case of one, William H. Muller & Co. of New York, a Federal court had imposed a fine of \$10,000 on charges of violating the embargo.