

**Editorials**

# The Viet Cong's POW Return Plan

IN THEIR PARIS PROPOSALS yesterday for a Vietnam peace, the Viet Cong, it has been observed, have voted for something that an impressive number of United States Senators have already voted for—U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam by a date certain, provided our men taken prisoner come out too.

There may be—we do not say for sure there is — something negotiable in the seven terms laid down by Mrs. Nguyen Binh. In saying that the American withdrawal and the liberation of POWs "will begin on the same date and end on the same date," the Viet Cong's delegate and spokeswoman gave precision to a point that has been vexingly vague up to now. Heretofore, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese have spoken in terms of "you withdraw first, we'll discuss the return of the POWs afterwards." This has never been acceptable. By themselves withdrawing from their once-fixed position, the Viet Cong, many observers feel, have gone a long way to help the Nixon Administration arrive at the conditions it wants to achieve.

Not the least significant aspect of the Viet Cong proposals, as noted by correspondents, was the fact that Mrs. Binh kept a civil tongue in her head as she outlined them. Absent were the familiar denunciations of President Nixon, the aspersions upon American imperialism, and such conventional Communist baggage. This suggested a shift in Viet Cong purpose from merely making propaganda to that of doing business.

THIS IS EVIDENT from the comments of Senate minority leader Hugh Scott and majority leader Mike Mansfield. Scott found the offer encouraging and heartening, said that President Nixon's position had paid off, and "now we can start negotiating seriously."

It seemed to hint of some inside knowledge when Senator Mansfield said the new Viet Cong proposals "very likely fit in with the probes made by the President over the last several months." He gave Mr. Nixon full credit for these initiatives.

It is easy to believe that the trip to Saigon and Paris on which Dr. Henry A. Kissinger left yesterday will likewise fit in with these developments. Three years after the opening of the Paris discussions, three years in which nothing has been agreed upon save the shape of the table, action may at last conceivably come.