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N. Viet Pullout Being Negotiated

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ONLY ONE item remains unresolved out of the "six or seven concrete issues" which had to be renegotiated with Hanoi when Henry Kissinger last mentioned the subject in public.

True, the outstanding issue is the most difficult of all, that of withdrawing North Vietnamese troops from the South. But the elimination of the other problems at the last session of the Paris talks represents such remarkable progress that there is now good reason to believe that the final obstacle may also be overcome.

No such confident claims are made by the White House, which still refuses to discuss the Paris talks with outsiders. But some of the key details may be deduced, as before, by reading between the lines of the Communist press and relating the result to other pieces of the jigsaw puzzle available in the West.

After the smiles in Paris, the handshakes and the intimate walks in the garden which provided the only indication of progress, a glum Kissinger took his leave, and Mr. Nixon was observed to "scowl" when photographers were allowed in to take pictures of the President as he listened to the report being delivered by his emissary.

BUT WE need not be reduced to relying on such fickle sources of information. A recent article in the Hanoi paper Nhan Dan might appear at first sight equally negative, perhaps even more so, but it repays close scrutiny.

The article was clearly intended to sum up the situation as it now stood, in preparation for the decisive, perhaps final, session announced for next week.

So, when Nhan Dan ignored the half dozen issues listed by Kissinger, and concentrated instead on the question of withdrawal, it was legitimate to conclude

that enough progress had been made on the other problems to make it possible to narrow down the negotiations to the ultimate essentials.

What Hanoi said on the problem of withdrawal, which its press has never discussed in this kind of de-

tail, was equally significant.

It argued that the negotiations had been deadlocked for four years precisely on the question of withdrawal.

The deadlock, it said, had been broken only because Hanoi had shown its "good will," that is, made concessions, and because the United States "agreed" to certain propositions.

These envisioned "that the problem of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam shall be solved by the two South Vietnamese sides." After the war they would discuss the "measures to reduce the troop ceilings of the two sides' armed forces, and to demobilize the troops being reduced."

THIS MUCH was stated in the first Hanoi disclosure of the Paris accords, which made it possible, in combination with other bits and pieces, to suggest that there was in fact a secret, unwritten agreement providing for a partial withdrawal. This has since been confirmed by news leaks in Washington, which have not been accepted uncritically because they may be self-serving, and, more importantly, by Communist spokesmen in Paris.

In talking to Western correspondents the Communist spokesmen denied that there were any secret clauses, but they told a Japanese correspondent in Paris that the agreement consisted of both "written" and "verbal" parts, including "unwritten understandings."

This is what Nhan Dan has in mind when it discusses with such emphasis the question of withdrawal. The agreement on this issue,

it says, was the very "basis" of the Paris accord, and if the principles underlying it are not recognized, "there can be no peace."

What Hanoi is saying is that while there may be some room for further "unwritten" adjustments, there is no possibility whatever that "the basis" and "the principle" could be renegotiated and written into a new agreement. Since the U.S. administration wants practical results rather than a piece of paper stating certain principles, it will presumably accept this offer, if, indeed, it has not already accepted it.