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What Hanoi Accepted

IF HANOI does not mean to cheat flagrantly, Hanoi has accepted near-total defeat in the long war that has cost North Vietnam so cruelly. That plain fact is worth underlining for quite simple reasons.

To begin with, there is a lot of confusion about the terms of the draft agreement prepared by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. It is not unnatural confusion, since Dr. Kissinger admirably followed one of the first rules of diplomacy. This is to get everything you want yourself without unnecessarily humiliating your enemy.

Thus Hanoi loudly and persistently demanded the destruction of the Saigon government, and its replacement by a coalition government. In the end, Hanoi was forced to settle for leaving President Nguyen Van Thieu both in place and in power. But a coalition fig-leaf was also provided, to make giving way on the main point less bitter for Hanoi.

THE FIG-LEAF takes the form of a tri-partite commission charged with preparing a new election in South Vietnam, but without any governing powers. To make assurance doubly sure, it is also provided that this coalition can make no decision of any kind, except by a unanimous vote.

It should not take much foresight to foretell that unanimity is most unlikely to prevail in any commission comprising President Thieu's representatives, Communist representatives and neutralist representatives. Hence the commission has no real importance—except as a fig-leaf.

Then, too, Hanoi stoutly refused, throughout the negotiations, to admit the presence of the numerous North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. But in the end, Hanoi was forced to agree to total withdrawal of all "foreign troops" from both Laos and Cambodia.

But even a U.S. senator ought to be able to see that 100,000 soldiers, many hundreds of miles from home in a strange land, cannot sustain and supply themselves on air alone. And that will be the result if all North Vietnamese are

to be withdrawn from Cambodia and Laos.

Cambodia provides essential bases for the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam. Their even more essential supply line runs through Laos, and requires tens of thousands of men to operate. Hence the absence of specific provisions concerning the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam is really inconsequential. It is another fig-leaf for Hanoi, in fact.

Failure to destroy President Thieu's government, plus effective abandonment of the North Vietnamese military effort in the South—these are the essential features of the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho draft agreement. Anyone with practical common sense should be able to see that these two features, in and of themselves, add up to Hanoi's acceptance of near-total defeat.

SINCE THE last report in this space, moreover, far more evidence has accumulated that for the next few years, at last, cheating by Hanoi is genuinely unlikely. In particular, it is now known that the theme of American aid for North Vietnam's reconstruction was struck very early in the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho talks.

The North Vietnamese representatives raised the issue of aid, and furthermore they harped on it with great persistence. They actually wanted a detailed aid-agreement to be drawn up, in parallel with the cease-fire agreement. But Dr. Kissinger merely committed the U.S. in principle, as President Johnson had done, in reality, some years ago.

The aid agreement is instead to be negotiated after the return of the U.S. prisoners in North Vietnamese hands. On this point, again, the North Vietnamese yielded a position obstinately maintained for a long period. But it was also the North Vietnamese who spontaneously suggested a joint U.S.-North Vietnamese commission to administer the aid over a five year term. This is hardly consistent with an intent to break the cease-fire agreement as soon as it is initiated.

There are two other dangers to this successful outcome of the war that also need mention, however. President Thieu, a deeply

cautious and suspicious man, may not have the boldness and energy to seize the opportunity that has now been presented to him. In South Vietnam just about all the cards will be left in his hands. But he must play the cards with courage and skill.

There is also some danger of the successful outcome being sabotaged by the numerous American politicians and thinkers who endlessly said that we ought to surrender because we could never get an honorable settlement. These people look pretty silly now. It is sordid, too, that there should be any danger of sabotage on their part. But accuracy compels noting it.

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