

'Hope Is Reborn'

President Nixon's decision to stop the bombing of North Vietnam north of the Twentieth Parallel and to send Henry Kissinger back to Paris signals a return to sanity that will be greeted with relief throughout the nation and the world. As French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann remarked: "Hope is reborn."

Welcome as is the abandonment of this rain of death from the sky, the same mystery that surrounded the escalation of the air war two weeks ago surrounds its termination. There is still no trustworthy information on what caused the initial breakdown in negotiations, why the President thought bombing of the densely populated Hanoi-Haiphong area would accomplish anything constructive and, least of all, whether there is any new readiness by Hanoi, Saigon or Washington to make concessions that will bring a total end to the killing in Vietnam. The two indispensable ingredients in "serious" negotiations of the kind now promised are greater flexibility and a genuine mutual will for peace.

North Vietnam has undoubtedly suffered cruelly from the most intensive aerial bombardment in history, but the United States has also paid a terrible price for this crude attempt to negotiate through terror. Losses in aircraft and men were staggering, even accepting the official estimate of 25 planes shot down, including fifteen giant B-52's, and 93 airmen killed, captured or missing. But the still larger loss for the long run is in credibility and respect at home and abroad.

The damage to United States moral leadership in the world was reflected in the report of Dr. Leon N. Cooper of Brown University, returning from a month in Europe where he received a Nobel Prize in Physics. He said his conversations with Europeans had convinced him that "we are coming to be regarded in the eyes of the world as Twentieth-century Huns." Similar expressions of outrage and condemnation have echoed throughout the globe, from official as well as unofficial sources, among them many long-time friends of this country.

At home, the aerial blitz in the face of an agreement that chief Presidential negotiator Kissinger had described as "99 per cent" complete transformed a national tragedy into an Orwellian nightmare. Senator William B. Saxbe, Republican of Ohio, expressed the incredulous despair of many Americans when he said: "I have followed President Nixon through all his convulsions and specious arguments, but he appears to have lost his senses on this."

The cessation of bombing north of the Twentieth Parallel recreates an environment for progress toward peace. But the very fact that intensive talks will not even begin again until next week raises doubt that anything fundamental has changed. If that missing 1 per cent Mr. Kissinger says is needed for a full accord continues to prove a will o' the wisp, an exasperated Congress will have to exercise its own prerogative to cut off funds for this unholy and unwanted war.