

By Anthony Lewis

LONDON, Dec. 31—Fragment found in a dusty future corner of a time machine:

Dr. Kissinger: Ladies and gentlemen: After the 97th round of negotiations, I can say that a peace agreement is now 99 and 44/100 per cent complete. It is obvious that a war that has pre-occupied us for a generation is drawing to a conclusion.

If you will permit me, I would like to make one personal comment. When the number of North Vietnamese killed by the bombing passed six million last week, I noticed that a foreign commentator asked how I could go on playing a part in such a war. Those of you who know me best, who have been my friends over these many difficult years, will know that my object all along has been to settle this war by negotiations.

That end is at hand. All that remains is to be sure that the peace will be a lasting one.

The President has therefore asked for a few minor clarifications in the tentative agreement. I will not go into the substance of the negotiations, but I can give you an example of the kind of problem the President wants to settle without ambiguity. That is the problem of elections.

The agreement has always been that a cease-fire would be followed in due course by a free election in South Vietnam. But President Thieu has felt a concern—and I may say that we regard it as a justified concern—about the effect undisciplined parties might have on the fragile structure of democracy in South Vietnam. We have therefore suggested that we include in the peace agreement a clear provision that only members of the New Democracy party be allowed to vote. As you know, that is President Thieu's party.

I have read some speculation in the press about Saigon having a veto on this agreement. Let me assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no such thing. The obstacle cannot be Saigon because we do not have, as yet, an agreement that we can present to Saigon.

We remain convinced that the unsettled issues are soluble in a very brief period of time. We have given a solemn undertaking, and I repeat it here now, to settle them at one more meeting.

All that is required is goodwill from the other side. With that we can have an agreement that will be an act of

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healing, and that will restore both peace and unity to America.

Thank you. I will be glad to answer some of your questions.

Q. Why have the talks broken off? It seems that Hanoi is not showing the goodwill you mention. What do you think they are up to?

A. I don't want to speculate on Hanoi's motives. But I can indicate to you the kind of charade we have been facing in these negotiations.

When I went back to Paris last month, I put our clarification of the election procedure on the table. The Communists then raised an entirely irrelevant demand—release of political prisoners in South Vietnam. Not only irrelevant, I may say, but frivolous, because unfortunately all the political prisoners have died.

Q. Why have we resumed full-scale bombing of North Vietnam?

A. There is a simple answer to that: The Communists violated the understanding of August, 1975. You remember that we agreed to limit our bombing to 20,000 tons a week in return for assurance that no Vietnamese would appear above ground between 6 A.M. and midnight. Our unarmed reconnaissance planes saw three people walking on the Hanoi salt plain the other day. We had no choice but to remove the bombing limits.

Q. The new British Prime Minister has denounced the increased bombing. Does that concern you?

A. If she thinks about what happened to Sweden, she might worry. *(Laughter.)*

Q. Dr. Kissinger, you have been in this job now under two Presidents. Do you ever feel that you would like to go back to academic life?

A. Yes, I often think that I would like to take up that long-standing invitation to All Souls. Or perhaps just join my friend Winston Smith in the café around the corner.

But I do not feel that I can shed this burden while I am the trustee of so many hopes. It has been painful in these negotiations to think of the hopes of millions and, indeed, of the hopes of you ladies and gentlemen.

Now we must redouble our efforts for a just peace, especially because we do not want to get peace mixed up in the political year ahead. I need hardly remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that today is Dec. 31, 1983.