

Congress Demands Peace

Whatever its impact on the negotiating position of the other side, it is now clear that President Nixon's 12-day aerial blitz against North Vietnam has had a backlash at home that cannot but affect the American bargaining stance. When Henry Kissinger returns to the Paris talks, he will have, in addition to Presidents Nixon and Thieu, an aroused Congress looking over his shoulder.

Republican Senator Saxbe's prediction last week that "all hell is going to break loose" unless the President changes course in Indochina appears to be sustained by the angry mood in which Congress has convened. The Democratic majority in both houses has gone on record demanding an immediate end to American involvement in the Vietnam conflict. Leaders in both houses have warned that unless a settlement is speedily negotiated—by Inauguration Day on Jan. 20, according to Senator Fulbright—Congress will move to cut off further funds for the war effort.

Even members of his own party are faltering in their support of the President's policy. Senator Percy of Illinois could not muster more than a 16-to-10 vote among Republican Senators in support of Mr. Nixon's efforts "to end the tragic conflict in Indochina now through a negotiated settlement." Senator Saxbe, whose defection was early and notable, spoke for many in both parties when he cited the indignation of "the average upright American who's had enough."

It is beyond dispute that, as Administration spokesmen have taken pains to point out, this ugly division does not offer the most favorable basis for American participation in the coming negotiations. The fault, however, does not lie with the critics whose patience has been tried beyond endurance through four long years. It rests rather with a President who has sacrificed his most precious bargaining asset—the confidence and support of a free people—by arrogantly disregarding the Congress and ordering military actions that have horrified the civilized world.

Mr. Nixon can regain the unity and self-respect this nation desperately needs by abandoning the dangerous illusion that negotiation through terror is the same as negotiating from strength and by sending Mr. Kissinger to Paris with instructions to seek an accord that will guarantee the speedy safe return of American troops and prisoners from Vietnam. This fundamental objective has the support of all Americans. It appears to be within reach today, just as it was apparently within reach last October when Mr. Kissinger proclaimed that peace was "at hand."