

Hanoi Regards Unanimity Rule As Useful Tool

(The writer recently returned from a two-week trip to North Vietnam.) 2/5/73

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National concord and "unity," Vietnamese style, hardly mean exactly the same thing to Vietnamese as they do to Westerners, the coming struggle for political control in Saigon is bound to reveal.

Westerners, including some American strategists, were surprised during the prolonged cease-fire negotiations in Paris by the North

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Vietnamese insistence that the rule of unanimity must apply in the projected three-segment National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord for South Vietnam.

To American ears this sounds like a procedure guaranteed to produce deadlock and to make the Council powerless.

As a result, many American officials have reasoned, the intended Council should pose no threat whatever to Vietnam of President the continued rule in South Nguyen Van Thieu.

With the unanimity rule operating in the Council, it has been argued privately inside the Nixon administration, Thieu's regime faces no real challenge that a potential "coalition" government may emerge from the Paris accord. With decisions requiring unanimity for action, it is claimed, Thieu's forces on the Council can

block with ease anything they oppose.

Contention Rejected

North Vietnamese planners, however, who are not noted for political naivete, reject this contention.

In probing conversations conducted in Hanoi, the initial responses of North Vietnamese officials to inquiries on why they insisted upon "unanimity" in the Council, produced superficial replies that matched the comforting language in the Paris agreement: to achieve "a spirit of national reconciliation and concord" with "respect" for opposing viewpoints.

But under further questioning, the North Vietnamese conceded that their underlying dual rationale for the "unanimity" rule was to prevent Thieu's forces from imposing their will on the Vietcong faction in the National Council, and to use the process to isolate Thieu's supporters by portraying them as the barriers to peace in South Vietnam.

In a Vietnamese context, as alien as this may sound to Westerners, officials in Hanoi maintain that this form of political encirclement can prove quite effective.

The process, as explained by Hoang Tung, editor of the official newspaper Nhan Dan, and an alternate member of North Vietnam's Communist Central Committee, is that "first you try to get unanimity." If there are "differences between the various forces," he said, an attempt is then made to resolve them. Should that fail,

the dissenters are then isolated and shown up to the public as intransigent obstructionists.

No one can risk "trying to block everything" under this formula, Tung maintained.

Nguyen Van Tien, suave chief of the provisional Revolutionary Government (Vietcong) representation in Hanoi, and often an adviser in the Paris talks, said: "This way of working must take time, because it is difficult. Although it takes time, if it comes to results it is a good thing."

'Our Tradition'

"A spirit of national concord is our tradition," he said. "Now we must face reality . . . We must have confidence I only say that we are confident about the general principle"

"Of course," Tien continued archly, "there are some men like Nguyen Van Thieu who are always difficult. But there are other men who have good will."

"This is the general aspiration," he said, and then Tien added bluntly, "And those who are against the spirit will be abandoned."

Tien said, "the Saigon administration has many cunning means which we have already denounced."

But he and other officials in Hanoi displayed confidence that what they choose to label "the spirit of national concord" will prevail in the end—with or without the consent, or the participation, of the Thieu regime.