



Is Kennedy Inching To the Presidency?

Joseph Kraft

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY set off this week on some foreign travel that will carry him closer to the race for President. He will be visiting Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union where he is to meet the Russian party boss Leonid Brezhnev.

In deciding to make the trip, Kennedy accepted political risks not required merely to maintain his place in the Senate. What outweighed the risks, apparently, was his interest in entering the great debate on detente which has up to now been dominated by the leading Democratic presidential candidate, Senator Henry Jackson.

The importance of Kennedy's upcoming travels can best be assessed by comparison with the past. Up to now the senator has chiefly been identified in foreign policy with splinter issues heavily loaded with elements of moral righteousness.

★ ★ ★

HIS PRESENT travels, by contrast, focus sharply on the big and difficult foreign policy issue — the issue of detente with the Soviet Union. The senator's first step on his current tour is West Germany, where he is visiting, among others, the Western political leader most experienced in direct dealings with Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe—Chancellor Willy Brandt.

After a brief shuttle back to the United States, Kennedy will be off to Eastern Europe. There he will visit one country, Yugoslavia, which has achieved a certain liberalization in opposition to Russia, and another country, Poland, which has achieved a certain liberalization within

the Soviet security system, or Warsaw Pact.

Finally, the senator will spend about a week in Russia. Apart from Moscow, and Brezhnev, he will be seeing Leningrad and one city outside European Russia.

When Kennedy first thought about making the trip a month ago, several leading foreign policy experts in the Democratic Party expressed strong reservations. It was pointed out to the senator that hardliners, for example Senator Jackson, could cite his trip to argue that Kennedy was naive, and therefore soft, on Russia.

Kennedy swept the objections aside. "Going to Russia," he said in one internal debate, "is the only way to make an impact. I'm going because I want to make an impact."

★ ★ ★

BUT ON WHAT? Well, all the signs indicate that Kennedy wants a piece of the debate on detente now being conducted by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Senator Jackson. "I'd like to broaden the options for the Democratic Party and the American People," he said in a chat the other day.

Kennedy also makes it clear that he sees the detente debate as a presidential issue. Why Kennedy should now be edging close to a presidential race is not altogether clear. But he has deep misgivings about what he conceives to be the hawkish policies now being enunciated by Senator Jackson. He does not want the 1976 presidential nomination to go to Jackson, and the stronger Jackson looks the more Kennedy is likely to come forward.