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Vietnam: A power poker

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COMMENTS

Vietnam

A Power Poker

Individuals as well as nations often have to pay very dearly for illusions. If ever the US Administration really believed in its Vietnamisation policy, it has now something to think about. But the powers-that-be probably always knew better. As long as the good old domino-theory prevailed and the spirit of a crusade dominated, the Vietnam war seemed to make sense. However, for years already—since it was realised that China is not going to pocket all its border areas and that Vietnamese nationalism is too fierce ever to submit the country to another super-power—the question for the USA has been how to disentangle from the dirty war without burdening itself with the blame for forsaking a trusting ally and so losing face and international creditability.

Now a bewildered world watches the recent events in Vietnam: the offensive of the North and the retaliatory measures of the USA, which has concentrated a huge naval and air power in this far corner of the Pacific, is bombing North Vietnam and its supply lines with China and mined Haiphong Harbour and the other ports which handled major supplies of weapons, oil and food for the enemy. Knowing that the present offensive will—at least in the short run—hardly be influenced to such an extent as to justify the political risks President Nixon is taking in this election year, there seems to be one obvious reason only for this strategy. It is to be found in the poker game between the super-powers, to whom Vietnam is no more than a secondary issue. After the North Vietnamese offensive was unexpectedly successful, Nixon had to take a chance in order to improve his position at the Moscow conference table. This play seems to have paid off, since the Russian reactions so far are very restrained indeed. They seem to be very anxious not to risk the President's Moscow trip. But considering the suffering and misery brought upon the wretched people of Vietnam, one can only keep fingers crossed and hope for the best. hg.

Germany

Implementation of the "Ostpolitik"

Although the treaties of Moscow and Warsaw passed the Bundestag on May 17, neither the coalition nor the opposition can be happy about the final outcome of this long and strenuous ratification debate. Federal Chancellor Brandt learned that in future he can only count on 248 of 496 deputies and thus has no longer the support of a majority in Parliament. On the other hand, Barzel, who does not have a majority either,

learned that he is not undisputed as the Opposition Leader. For notwithstanding his pledge for ratification, after a Parliament resolution which emphasised the *modus-vivendi*-character of the treaties was jointly formulated, the Opposition opted for vote abstention.

Because of the importance of the treaties not only for the future relationship between the Federal Republic and the Socialist countries but also for the general détente process between East and West, it would have been better if a larger Bundstag majority had voted for them. But one should not forget that in democratic countries it is not unusual to make important decisions with very narrow majorities. It is now in the interest of all concerned to concentrate on the possibilities the treaties offer for the normalisation and improvement of overall relations.

The question most discussed in Bonn is, what will happen next. Now that the controversial eastern treaties have finally been ratified, the logical way out would be to have a general election at the earliest possible date. Some politicians argue that there is no guarantee that this would lead to a larger majority on either side. Due to the complicated German voting system this is a risk. But this risk is inherent in all elections, i.e. also in 1973. Others fear that the election campaign would bring the strongest confrontation ever known in the Federal Republic. However, this would not necessarily be a disadvantage, since it could help to clarify the alternatives of the different issues urgently to be discussed. Under the present constitution the dissolution of Parliament is most complicated. It is therefore necessary that both Brandt and Barzel get together again and agree upon the best Parliament dissolution procedure. crm.

Foreign Trade

Private Initiatives in East-West Trade

Organisations and companies of renown in a number of western countries which take an interest in the development of economic relations between East and West are about to issue a joint statement on East-West trade. A preparatory conference was held in Paris for this purpose in April. The US Committee for Economic Development (CED), the British Political and Economic Planning (PEP), the German Association for Economic and Social Development (CEPES) and corresponding institutions and associations in France, Italy, Sweden and Japan first came out in support of the liberalisation and intensification of East-West relations in 1965 when they adopted a joint resolution. At that time the American delegation — conforming to the political relationship of