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Editorials

The Chinese Spying Offer

IT IS PROVING rather hard to keep up with the surprises handed us by the Chinese leadership that threw out the Gang of Four, encouraged the uninhibited display of wall posters, fostered a sort of First Amendment debate on human rights, went to war in Vietnam to "teach the Vietnamese a lesson," then withdrew from Vietnam and began peace talks, then again drew back from its First Amendment stance and started ripping off the wall posters and pushing and shushing the free-speech speakers in the squares of Beijing.

These are all conscious moves intended to carry China on toward modernization and away from Maoism, we suppose. If their central impulse is more liberal than authoritarian, it is welcome. But what are we to think about the latest offer of the lively, sprightly Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping? He tells a group of United States senators that China would be glad to install American electronic monitoring equipment on its own soil to help keep track of Soviet compliance with the U. S.-Soviet SALT II treaty now being negotiated.

WHILE NOTHING COMING OUT of Beijing these days could really stupefy us, this comes close. An offer from the Communists of the People's Republic to set up along their border with the Soviet Union the kind of black boxes we lately lost to the Iranian revolutionaries is not the kind of helpful gesture one would expect from them.

The ability of the United States to monitor the Soviet missile establishment to determine how honestly their treaty promises are kept is an issue of high contention in domestic American politics, and evidently the Chinese are aware of that. So their offer to help spy on the Russians, using *our* monitoring stations manned by *their* technicians, must have delighted Premier Deng to make. It is so scornful of the Russians that the correspondents in Hong Kong who reported this proposal last week suggested it might indeed not be a firm offer but an effort by Deng to ruffle the Soviets.

SENATOR FRANK CHURCH, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who headed the U. S. delegation, was not entirely prepared for this unusual proposal from a Communist state to link up with us against the Russians. He observed cautiously, after Deng had launched the idea in reply to a question from Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, that "we'd have to pursue the matter further."

One can see why. What the United States would gain from a string of listening posts along the 4000-mile Soviet-Chinese border might be very useful intelligence, though experts warn that the deep-Asian monitors would be very remote from the action they would listen in on. But what the United States would also certainly gain from this collaboration with the Chinese would be the deep and hostile resentment of the Soviets for having made a pact with the devil, once their friend and ally.

In this light, Deng's offer must be very carefully thought over.