

Canadian missionary who was seized in Laos last October. I was quite frankly shocked to hear them tell me that Mr. Oppel's release would be delayed until certain domestic political arrangements in Laos had been agreed on. In other words, until a government had been formed in Laos under the new agreement. I replied in very plain language, making it clear to him that there could be no possible relationship between the continued imprisonment of a non-combatant Canadian citizen and political developments in that country. He promised to report my position to his superiors and I also raised this question with the political leaders when I was in Hanoi and they too promised to look into it. The reason I raised it in Hanoi is that Mr. Oppel's name first appeared on a list of prisoners supplied by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, so I felt justified in raising his name with them, and he said "we will take this up with our allies, the Pathet Lao". Finally, I spent a day in Hanoi talking with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and the Foreign Minister, Trinh. This was the first visit ever made by a Canadian minister to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which we just recognized a few weeks ago in order to show our impartiality as a member of the International Control Commission.

All of my talks with political leaders in Hanoi and Saigon centred upon the question of continued Canadian participation in the Commission.

As I have already indicated, the views of all the leaders with whom I spoke were to the effect that Canada should continue to serve on the Commission. Most of these leaders emphasized that the consequences of an early Canadian withdrawal would be far-reaching. I have also received similar views from the Governments of the United States, Britain, Indonesia and China. I made no commitment to any of them at that time and, in case you think I'm going to reveal any secrets, I'm not going to make any commitments here today, because the question is still before the Government.

While the advice to us had a common theme, I think it is relevant to point out that each party has its own distinctive reasons for wishing us to stay on.

For reasons which are very understandable, governments of countries not directly involved in Vietnam tend to suggest that any international presence is better than no international presence and that it's even better if Canada is there. For Canadians our 19 years in Vietnam have long since disabused us of any such illusions.

I found the attitudes of the leaders in South Vietnam very direct. They have no illusion that the ICCS would be able to discharge effectively the responsibilities set out in the Paris agreement. Indeed, I'm inclined to think sometimes that the way we want the ICCS to work is just an amiable eccentricity on our part. I explained very frankly to the Vietnamese, both in the South and in the North, that the composition of the Commission made it extremely unlikely that the Commission would ever reach a finding unfavourable to North Vietnam or to its allies in the South. At the same time I said that Canada would not hesitate to support a finding detrimental to the position of the Republic of Vietnam if we felt that the facts indicated such finding, because we take an impartial view. We don't look upon ourselves as representing