

Viet Nam

distinguished and learned hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. Stackhouse); I want to hear from my hon. friend from Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), from my hon. friend from Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) and from other hon. members. So I will telescope my comments, not because of lack of interest, not because of lack of comments but because I want to hear from them.

I want to say at the outset that I join with those who applaud and salute the quality of the military forces of this country. I have always felt that way. I was honoured last spring to be on the committee which toured bases in the west, in the north and in the central part of this country and I have an even higher regard for those fine men who constitute the military of this country. If I were a nasty politician I might say that I would be surprised that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) would ever settle for anything which had the expression "60 days" in it, because I remember those famous 60 days of decision and what they did to a certain party. I remember that Mr. Pearson once said, "Perhaps the '60 days' elected us; I don't know. But it damned near defeated us; that I am sure of."

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Macquarrie: But this is a much more serious matter. This is an issue which concerns us all and troubles us all. God knows, there is not one member of this House who does not welcome the end of the war in Viet Nam. I don't want to sound like a genouton, Mr. Speaker, and with my youthful looks that would be a presumption on the acting profession, but in my first speech on foreign affairs I mentioned Indo-China, way back in July of 1958. As the minister said the other day, this is a war that had gone on for a whole generation. It has been a dirty war and, naturally, it is going to be a dirty peace.

We are not disturbed if things do not fit dutifully into the moulds which the idealists expect; we are not disturbed about that situation at all. But I do take exception to those who believe that this country of ours, faced with the challenge, with the question, had only one answer. I am not here to cavil. I am not here to belittle. I am not here to make difficulties. But I do not think we had only one answer. I think it would have been just as honourable, just as realistic, just as sensitive to have said that perhaps, in the circumstances, this was not the time for Canada to involve itself. I would not have been ashamed of any government which said, "In the circumstances, why not look to some of the other 125 independent countries in the world?"

I do not agree with those who say we had no choice. But the choice having been made by the government, precipitously perhaps, we must make the best of it. But I am surprised that anyone in government dealing with an issue as sensitive, an issue which divides the Canadian people so painfully, would not rejoice in the opportunity to share this challenge, to discuss the issue with the Parliament of Canada rather than keeping to itself the executive prerogative of making a decision and, after the fact, notifying the people's representatives.

Here, Mr. Speaker, is where my hon. friend from Saint-Hyacinthe was not only at his most eloquent but at his most precise in terms of parliamentary values, parliamen-

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

tary rights, parliamentary rules and constitutional propriety. In the bitter days when Great Britain was almost overborne by the iniquitous and evil power of a terrible enemy, Winston Churchill, harrassed and burdened as no man probably ever was, told them, "It is a comfort to have the House of Commons in session so that the conscience of the nation can be expressed on the vital issues which assail us". And even Mr. Mackenzie King said during the war, and it is quite a move from Churchill to King, that it was a help, rather than an embarrassment, to have parliament involved.

So I say that the minister would have been far wiser, faced with an issue so delicate, where the dangers were so great, where the country was so uncertain, had he asked the House for its advice. He would have found every member in this chamber prepared to set aside partisan differences and deal realistically, honestly and decently with the question as to what Canada should do. There are dangers ahead and the government would have found itself strengthened had it confirmed its mandate by consulting with the people's representatives. We cannot go back on the decision which was taken, but my hon. friend from Saint-Hyacinthe has provided an opportunity for the government to assert the Canadian point of view, to strengthen the decision taken, to bring a greater degree of involvement, integration and understanding on the part of this country of what, let us face it, will be a protracted and, I am afraid, extremely difficult undertaking for many, many months ahead.

• (2030)

Not for one moment do I accept the idea that this country, and this country's representatives in Indo-China, can at some time hence, 60 days hence, casually say, "Well, the period has expired. We will go home." How, in the name of heaven, could we present ourselves to the international community under those circumstances? All these things should have been considered much more carefully.

I do not want to be critical of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson). He is probably one of the most thoughtful, pleasant members of the cabinet and is trying to do his best. But I was not impressed when he was asked the question, "What should our boys do if confrontation came up?" and he replied, "Duck." This is hardly a thoughtful observation in a very serious situation.

I have said that we have taken the course. Now we have to make the best of it. I am not sure that eternally it is the course of wisdom for the Canadian government to say to every country and on every occasion, in Dickens' words, "Barkis is willing!" or, as the Old Testament used to say, "Here am I, Lord. Send me." Perhaps a little more thoughtful observation might have been entered into, and considering what happened in the ICC, someone might have pondered whether or not on this particular occasion we were exercising the finest of wisdom on our own behalf and on behalf of world peace to say immediately, "We will go. Just call us."

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the advantages of being a veteran—although I represent the cradle of confederation, I am not a father of confederation albeit some people think I look like one—is that I was here in