

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 17, 1971

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Fourth report of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development—Mr. St. Pierre.

[*Editor's Note: For text of above report, see today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT BY MINISTER ON TRANSMISSION OF UNITED STATES MESSAGES TO HANOI IN 1964 BY CANADIAN OFFICIAL

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the attention of the House has been drawn to the publication this week by the *New York Times* of a series of documents describing the involvement of the United States in Indochina up to 1968. In these documents are several references dealing with the activities of an officer in the Department of External Affairs serving on the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet Nam in 1964-65. I should like to give the House the facts about his activities which he carried out on instructions from the Canadian government.

On June 10, 1965, my predecessor, the Hon. Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in a statement before the Standing Committee on External Affairs said:

● (11:10 a.m.)

I informed the House on Monday that our role in Viet Nam has not been supine and that we have attempted to use the channels available to us by virtue of our commission membership to establish contact with North Viet Nam. Our commissioner in Saigon, over the past eight months, prior to May 31 made several trips to the capital of North Viet Nam, Hanoi.

During these visits he has had discussion with the local leaders and officials in an attempt to assess the North Viet Nam government's position. I asked him to go to Hanoi on May 31 and to see someone senior in the government of Viet Nam, the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister, and this he did.

This is the most recent contact that he has made and although his report is not an encouraging one, I want to say that we have not abandoned the probing process. Mr. Seaborn, who is our commissioner, is an officer of considerable experience and ability. He is well qualified for an important assignment of this delicate nature. He had an interview with the Foreign Minister on May 31 in which he expressed Canada's concern, and our willingness to play a helpful role if possible.

He sought clarification of the North Viet Nam government's position including its reaction to the recent pause in the bombings. Naturally I cannot go into any greater detail about it at this time; but I would like to say that the Foreign Minister stated repeatedly that the four conditions which had previously been outlined by the Prime Minister of North Viet Nam on April 8, taken as a whole, represented the Hanoi government's approach to a settlement.

I should now like to give a full account of the nature of our commissioner's mission to Hanoi during the time he was in Viet Nam in 1964-65. In the spring of 1964 following a meeting between the United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Hon. Paul Martin, the Canadian government agreed that the new Canadian commissioner on the ICC in Viet Nam might be instructed to probe what was in the minds of the leaders in Hanoi and help to dispel any misunderstanding they might have as to the future course the United States intended to follow, that is, that the Americans were not thinking of pulling out of Viet Nam and were prepared to increase their commitment there if this were considered necessary.

Canada's motive in agreeing to this special mission for the Canadian commissioner was to try to promote a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Viet Nam. Thus the Canadian government considered it entirely consistent with, and indeed reinforcing, our role in the ICC. I should like to emphasize that the commissioner acted at no time as a direct representative of the United States government or president but only as a part of a Canadian channel of communication. It was clearly understood of course that messages to be conveyed in this way would be passed via Ottawa, that Canada did not associate itself with the content of the messages and that Canada would be free to add its own comments to any message passed in either direction. Our only commitment was that there would be faithful transmission of messages in both directions. The Canadian government's purpose in agreeing to participate in this channel of communication was to provide an opportunity to reduce misunderstandings between the United States and North Viet Nam and was founded on a strong desire to ensure the return of peace to Viet Nam and to Southeast Asia. This position was understood by both the Americans and the North Vietnamese throughout.

In the course of his tour of duty in Viet Nam, Mr. J. Blair Seaborn, who was the Canadian commissioner at the time, made six visits to Hanoi. Not all of these were occasioned solely by his special mission. Canadian members of the ICC maintain contact on a regular basis with the authorities of both South and North Viet Nam.

On his first two visits to Hanoi the commissioner was received by the North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on June 18 and August 13, 1964. During his