

The Vietnam question was placed before the Security Council at the beginning of February. There has been a good deal of discussion about the wisdom of this step, with particular reference to its timing after the bombing of North Vietnam had been resumed. As far as this Government is concerned, our position on this matter has remained unchanged. I said in the General Assembly last fall that the United Nations was the place, or one of the places, where the question of Vietnam should certainly be discussed. We have been aware, of course, that the prospects of the United Nations playing a direct part in relation to the Vietnam issue in present circumstances was very limited. This is not only because three of the principal parties to the Vietnam conflict are not members of the United Nations but also because there has been a reluctance on the part of some countries to have brought before the United Nations an issue such as this which directly engages the interests of the great powers.

Nevertheless, it would have been entirely inconsistent with Canadian attitudes and policies to deny, as I say, the right of the United Nations to pronounce itself on an issue which involves the maintenance of international peace and security perhaps more than any other issue at the present time. In our view, the provisions of the Charter in this matter are clear. It is regrettable that the Security Council should not have taken the opportunity of at least recommending to the parties that they seek a peaceful solution of the Vietnam conflict through the machinery for which they themselves have expressed a clear preference -- that is to say, the machinery created in Geneva in 1954.

The inability of the Security Council to deal with this issue has reinforced the judgment which we had formed some time ago, and which was in my mind when the debate in the House of Commons took place in February, that we should look to the International Commission in Vietnam to see whether, in the right circumstances, there was not a role which it could play toward bringing about a peaceful settlement of the issue there. This is the direction in which our thinking has been tending since last December, and it is to this aspect of the Vietnam problem that I want to turn.

The first question that arises is why it should be thought that the International Commission might be able to make a positive contribution to a solution of the Vietnam conflict. The Commission was brought into being by the Geneva Conference of 1954. We have served on that Commission since that time, along with India and Poland and, as well, we have served on the comparable commissions in Cambodia and Laos. In a sense, the Commission may be said to represent the continuing interest of the Geneva powers in the Vietnam situation. It is now clear that, when the time comes, any negotiation of the Vietnam conflict is likely to be conducted within the Geneva frame of reference. It is natural, therefore, to think of the Commission as an instrument which might be brought into play in preparing the ground for an eventual negotiation.

The question has been raised in our contacts with interested governments whether there is anything in the Geneva Cease-Fire Agreement which confers on the Commission a mandate on the lines we have been considering. I must say that, on a strictly legal interpretation of that Agreement, the answer must be in the negative. But I do not think anyone who is concerned about the course of developments in Vietnam would feel justified in looking at this issue