

Another deficiency is that the parties have provided that each of the four commission countries should pay not only the salaries and allowances of their personnel, but a fixed percentage of the general budget of the commission as well. This percentage turns out to be small, 2 per cent. The government is not inclined to make an issue of paying it. But however small, Canada has on several occasions expressed opposition in principle to paying any share of the general budget of the commission at all.

We believe that the provision for the sort of infrastructure and the payment for the ordinary expenses of the commission could have been met elsewhere. I understand the argument that is used in order to justify a token contribution from each of the members of the supervisory commission is that each of us under the circumstances would support economy in the expenses of the commission. This was the argument that was put to me. I said it was not one I could defend very well to the taxpayers of Canada who would in any event be paying the salaries and allowances of the personnel. I thought there were surely more effective ways of ensuring economy. However, as I say, the 2 per cent is very small and I would not for that reason consider that Canada should withdraw.

Then, too, we have been concerned that the task of the international observers be realistic and realizable. Yet the agreement provides that the commission shall supervise and control the entry into South Viet Nam of military personnel and all military equipment. This seems to specify a task which is clearly beyond the means of an international commission of this size or, indeed, of any likely size.

Finally, although passing reference is made in the agreement to Cambodia and Laos, no precise arrangements are envisaged for broadening the cease-fire and settlement to these two countries. There seems to be no intention of having them participate in the international conference. We can only hope that, in the weeks ahead, the effects of a cessation of hostilities in Viet Nam will be extended to these two countries, so that the fighting will stop throughout Indo-China. Indeed, it is disappointing that Asian involvement in the arrangements as a whole is so slight. The omission of Japan and the ASEAN group of countries, except for Indonesia, is particularly conspicuous.

• (1550)

Some of these shortcomings in the arrangement are now built in. Others could be altered at the International Conference. Still others could be corrected or alleviated in their effects if the parties and our associates in the commission show enough good will and enough determination to make the commission work and be effective. We shall be watching and working for that. As I said at the outset, we are not taking a passive or a reluctant attitude; we want to make the commission work.

The comments I have made are not intended as the sort of facile criticism that those who were not involved in hammering out the agreement can always level at those who were. Obviously, this was an extremely difficult negotiation. It is a wonder there was any agreement at all. I am not suggesting that the circumstances could have permitted a better arrangement. What I am trying to do is establish, from the point of view of a conscientious

Viet Nam

member of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, the magnitude of the task given to us and the apparent poverty of the arrangements available to carry it out. This is not an effort to establish some sort of fancied position of moral superiority. It is an attempt to explain why we cannot undertake an open-ended commitment at this time: to lay before the House and the Canadian people the sorts of problems that can be foreseen and that led us to warn we might have to withdraw.

We will do what we can to alleviate the effect of these shortcomings by our own efforts, by the manner in which we approach the commission's operations and our participation in them. I have referred, for example, to the provision for unanimity. We are determined not to be frustrated by it. One way we will do this is by making the commission and its activities and proceedings as open and public as possible. We shall consider ourselves free to communicate our views, and the difference between our views and those of other delegations, to whatever person or organization we think fit, or to the public and the press. This applies to the rule of unanimity or any other provision of the cease-fire that might reduce us to inactivity or ineffectiveness.

For sixty days we are going to put everything to the test: the viability and effectiveness of the international supervisory arrangements themselves, the will and determination of the parties and of our commission colleagues to make the agreements and the commission work, indeed ourselves and our own ability to make the commission work and work effectively. By the end of the 60 days, Canada will form its own judgment of that experience and of prospects for the future. On the basis of that judgment, Canada will reach its own decision on continued participation for a further period.

I want to say candidly now that in some important respects, the international observer arrangements are unpromising. I will not prejudge the government's decision either way, but no one should assume as a matter of course that continued Canadian participation will be forthcoming.

Before concluding these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hundreds of Canadian men and women, civilian and military, who have served in commissions in the past. I say this because, although I have said on a number of occasions that the International Control Commission was reduced to a farce, it was not because of lack of effort on the part of the Canadians who served on that commission. It was just in the nature of the arrangements that had been made and that we are trying to correct on this occasion.

I should like to pay tribute to the men and women who are now in Viet Nam to begin work in the new commission, and to those who are preparing to go there. They went there and they are now going, not because their country has national interests of its own to pursue there, but because Canada recognizes it has a responsibility to contribute to peace in the world if it can do so effectively. I know of no better way of contributing to Canada's national interest than to end the war in Viet Nam, or to help end the war in Viet Nam.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!