

Canadian or Vietnamese or humanitarian interest could we serve? Many have asked that question. It is asked of me frequently both in and out of the House of Commons.

I can assure you that successive Canadian Governments had serious misgivings about staying on. We did so because we knew that ultimately the war must come to an end -- that it was unlikely one side or the other would obtain a clear victory, and that in these circumstances any peace supervisory machinery, however, rusty, might be needed and needed quickly. If in this small way we could help to facilitate a settlement of the war, we were prepared to swallow our frustrations and keep on a skeleton staff which could spring to life, perhaps in a revised form, when a cease-fire was reached. But once over that road has been enough.

There were other reasons too. Although sometimes wrongly impugned as an American stooge, Canada and Canadian honesty in its work in Viet-Nam was generally respected by all sides. Some of the parties to the war indicated that they wanted us to stay on. They also wanted an international presence, symbolic of the old settlement to remain intact.

This brings us almost up to date. Let us look more closely at what has happened over the past three months:

- the intensive bombing of North Viet-Nam ceased;
- negotiations for a cease-fire resumed in Paris;
- a cease-fire agreement was signed by the four parties -- the Republic of Viet-Nam or South Viet-Nam, the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam or North Viet-Nam, the United States and the Viet Cong;
- Canada was formally invited to participate in the new peace supervisory commission along with Hungary, Poland and Indonesia;
- within hours of the signature of the agreement a Canadian delegation composed of members of my Department and the Department of National Defence, led by a senior Canadian Ambassador, Michel Gauvin, left for Saigon;
- an International Conference of 13 participants, including the Secretary General of the United Nations was convened in Paris at the end of last month to consider and endorse the cease-fire agreement;
- I attended as the leader of the Canadian delegation and unexpectedly found myself a co-chairman of the Conference sessions;
- most recently talks between the Republic of Viet-Nam and the other South Vietnamese Party have opened in Paris.

I have spoken briefly of the frustrations of the old commission and if you have a sinking feeling that history -- insofar as the utility of the commission is concerned -- may be repeating itself, I may tell you that I share this anxiety.

Because of this concern and because of our experience on the old commission, as soon as the possibility arose that Canada might be invited to participate in a new commission -- we made it clear that we would only accept such an invitation if our conditions based on this experience were substantially met.