

Inquiries of the Ministry

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for York South.

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**VIET NAM WAR—PRIOR NOTICE TO CANADA OF
PRESIDENT NIXON'S INTENTION—GOVERNMENT
POSITION—REQUEST FOR STATEMENT**

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. I appreciate that the Secretary of State for External Affairs is not scheduled to be here today, but in view of the serious situation in Southeast Asia I am sure the Prime Minister appreciated that questions might be asked of him. May I ask the Prime Minister whether the Canadian government was informed of the intention of the President of the United States to escalate the war in Viet Nam before he made his statement last night, or was that not the case?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, without agreeing to the use of the word "escalate" by the hon. member, which would lead us into a debate, I am sure he would agree that that can be interpreted in various ways and I do not suppose there is any more reason to talk of an escalation by the President than by North Viet Nam when it sent 12 divisions into the South.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: On the substance of the question, the answer is that the United States government did inform our embassy very slightly prior to the announcement by the President last night.

Mr. Lewis: I gather from the wording of the Prime Minister's answer, Mr. Speaker, that it is the position of the Canadian government that the announcement of the President of the United States of the intention to mine harbours in North Viet Nam is not a matter which distresses the government or against which the government is intending to protest?

Mr. Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member wants to gather that, he is not making the right assumption because I said that if we had any position to take we would consider making it known either through the Secretary of State for External Affairs or myself. What he can gather is that I think it is rather unusual to talk about an escalation by only one side when, I repeat, 12 divisions from the North invaded the South when this action was taken.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: It is always easier, Mr. Speaker, for a minister—

Some hon. Members: Question!

Mr. Lewis: Just hold your horses, if you have brains enough to do it.

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

• (1430)

Mr. Lewis: It is always easier for the Prime Minister to debate in giving an answer than it is for me when I ask a question. I wish to ask the Prime Minister finally whether he can give the House any assurance regarding a statement being made on behalf of the government some time this week before what has now happened in Viet Nam escalates into a world war or brings us to the brink of a world war?

Mr. Trudeau: I can only repeat my earlier answers on the possibility of a statement. I am willing to be helpful and to answer questions if the hon. member wants me to put on record statements which the government has previously made regarding the horrors of this war—

Mr. Lewis: It is a new situation.

Mr. Trudeau: —and the desirability of ending it by negotiation rather than by military force. This has been the position of the government and it is well known. I submit even that it is probably in the interests of the three main powers involved in Viet Nam to terminate this war by negotiation rather than by the horrors of war. I think the President's action does not necessarily contradict this reality.

[Translation]

**VIET NAM WAR—REPRESENTATIONS TO SOVIET UNION
RESPECTING AGGRESSION BY NORTH VIET NAM**

Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the right hon. Prime Minister.

Can he tell us whether he intends to make representations to the government of the Soviet Union, asking them to urge North Viet Nam to put an end to the communist aggression against South Viet Nam.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that President Nixon himself will make such representations to the Soviet government. With regard to the position of the Canadian government, we entertain good relations with the Soviet Union, the United States and the People's Republic of China and, should those countries feel a need for our views, Canada will always be ready to offer advice and, if required, to serve as an intermediary.

[English]

**VIET NAM WAR—SUGGESTED RECONVENING OF GENEVA
CONFERENCE**

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. In view of the grave threat to world peace inherent in the situation in Viet Nam, would the government consider seeking to have the Geneva conference reconvened thus leading to a ceasefire and a mutual exchange of prisoners between the two sides?