

Viet Nam

Mr. Wagner: The cautious view of success advanced by the minister indicates the degree to which these initiatives are important. If hostilities increase, there is the issue of the safety of our troops. My party expects the minister to be in daily contact with the field and to have proper contingency plans ready for evacuation, if necessary. We will press for daily assurances, if necessary. These are assurances that all Canadians have a right to receive.

We in this party share the minister's commitment to Canada's role in aiding the achievement of peace in Indo-China. We would have been stricter in the championing of our conditions and less eager to ignore their being watered down. Nevertheless, the goal in Indo-China is something about which the minister and myself have little quarrel.

There are those in this chamber who would call for immediate notification of a pull-out now and thereby leave nothing but despair as our legacy in Indo-China. I am proud that my colleagues and I do not share that view.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1430)

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to devote my time to the last few sentences of the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) but my purpose is to reply to the minister's statement.

The minister's final sentence is one which I think everyone in the House can endorse. I think it is worth restating. The minister said: "We will not take part in a charade nor will we passively condone inaction when we believe action is required." That is a position this party can endorse. But I want to express my doubt that the decision made by the government with respect to what Canada should now do is the best possible means of ensuring that this admirable goal is met.

The New Democratic Party endorsed Canada's decision to become a part of the International Commission of Control and Supervision. We did so because all four parties had asked us to participate in that commission and because we thought it important not to do anything at that time which could cause further delays in bringing about a prospective peace in Viet Nam, nothing which could introduce further delays in permitting the Americans to withdraw from a war in which they should never have been involved in the first place.

We also endorsed at that time the government's decision to participate provisionally on a 60-day basis, because we had some severe reservations about the conditions under which the commission would have to operate, reservations about the efficacy of the commission under those conditions, and we agreed that a review should take place at the end of 60 days and then a decision made. What worries me at the moment is that we have had that review and we still in some sense have not made a decision.

It rapidly became apparent to those of us who went to Viet Nam with the minister that, beyond the fact that the initial conditions which he set out, the two key ones, had not been met, that of an international authority to which the commission could report and that the commission should have freedom of access to all parts of South Viet Nam for the purpose of carrying out its investigations, the

[Mr. Wagner.]

prospects for the ICCS effectively carrying out its duties remain minimal for some additional reasons, one of which is the make-up of that commission. Canada on one side and Poland and Hungary on the other have very different conceptions of what the commission should be doing and the very difference in those conceptions makes it difficult for the commission to work. Beyond that, none of us who were in Viet Nam, I think it is fair to say, saw any great inclination on the part of any of the former belligerents, and I put the word "former" in quotation marks, to adhere to either the letter or the spirit of the Paris agreement. It was reported to us that since the so-called peace there had been some 14,000 violations of that peace, 7,000 of which had been reported and only 35 of which had been officially presented to the ICCS for investigation. At the time we were there it was only 26, now it is 35.

It became apparent to us during our visit to Viet Nam that the only reason the ICCS was effective even to that minimal extent was the vigorous action taken by the Canadian contingent there, action of the sort which had been referred to by the Department of External Affairs in a wry sort of way as their open-mouth policy, but action of a sort which the minister and other expert witnesses before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence have indicated can only be effective for a very, very brief period of time. On top of this evidence we have heard recently very pessimistic statements from our ambassador in Viet Nam, Mr. Gauvin. In addition, we have seen fresh reports of continued fighting and evidence that the situation may further degenerate and that fighting may accelerate.

Given all these facts, my party decided, and I think it is worth while to state it for the record, that on March 28 Canada should give the 90 days notice provided for in the agreement and make it clear that we are leaving at the end of that 90 days whether or not a replacement is found, whether or not the ICCS is functioning as designed and whether or not there is peace. There should always be the reservation that if the situation dissolves into chaos we shall have the right to remove our people from danger. In so doing we should indicate that we intend to continue, even intensify, for the entire remaining period of our stay our current techniques of operation which the Department of External Affairs refers to as the open-mouth policy. Much greater attention should be devoted to the fate of political prisoners in the remaining period. This solution has the advantage of ensuring that we have done everything possible tactically, technically, administratively and logistically to ensure that the ICCS is capable of operating as designed if by some chance it should be permitted to do so. Moreover, we will have removed ourselves before our abrasive tactics have become ineffective, thus permitting another nation to take up the cudgels. And by making our commitment to withdraw definite we will ensure that the four parties to the Paris agreement will look for someone to take our place, and find someone. In addition, if by some miracle peace is attained, the ICCS will in 90 days have carried out its major and most urgent functions under the terms of the agreement and it would then be a fairly simple matter for another country to move in and carry out the relatively routine duties remaining. Further, that timespan would permit the possibility of finding a replacement, allowing it to brief itself