

*Viet Nam*

To avoid misunderstanding let me add this: we are not going to tackle those first 60 days of the commission's existence in a spirit of diffident and passive caution. We are going to make this commission work, if it can be made to work. Within its properly limited functions, we shall try to make it an active and inquisitive commission and an open, hard working and co-operative one. Frustration, inactivity and ineffectiveness have been forced upon us in Viet Nam in the past. If they are forced upon us again, we are determined that it will be no fault of Canada's.

• (1540)

Members will be aware that the cease-fire machinery includes joint commissions on which the parties to the cease-fire are represented, as well as the international commission on which Canada is serving. Unless these joint commissions function effectively, the international commission cannot function.

There have been great difficulties in setting up these joint commissions. Many of these difficulties seem to be psychological in nature. Given the history of the conflict, this is no surprise. The time of enforced waiting is, however, being put to good use by the International Commission on Control and Supervision. The logistics support and organizational arrangements for the teams and the headquarters are being improved. So far, co-operation between the members of the ICCS has left nothing to be desired. The moment the joint commissions are functioning effectively, the international commission can begin to deploy its teams and get down to work. I was informed today that the first movement of the commissions may begin very soon out to very limited areas. The situation in Viet Nam is still serious. I do not want to minimize the real risks that exist. These can only increase if the cease-fire itself, and the supervisory parties, continue to be ineffective.

In trying to make the commission work, we shall bear in mind that there are things which neither we nor the commission as a whole are expected to do. In particular, it must be clearly understood that neither the Canadian delegation nor the commission as a whole are a force to keep the peace. I regret very much that the shorthand term peacekeeping force is used so frequently because it seems to cause misunderstanding on the part of the general public. We are not sending a regiment to keep the peace in Viet Nam. We are sending a group of civilians and members of the armed forces to undertake a civilian task, which is to supervise a peace which we hope will come. It is the parties to the agreement who bear the responsibility for keeping the peace. We may be able to play a good offices role from time to time if the parties wish to avail themselves of the services of the commission or of the Canadian delegation for that purpose.

To accomplish the tasks which do form part of the responsibilities of the commission, we have provided, and are continuing to assemble, a body of men and women of the first quality. The delegation is headed by a foreign service officer of distinction and experience, including experience in Indo-China, Ambassador Michel Gauvin. It is composed of personnel of the Department of National Defence and of the Department of External Affairs who have been specially selected for the task. Many of them have previous experience of Indo-China and of interna-

tional observation roles elsewhere. They can be counted upon to do all that anyone could, and the government will give them maximum support in their task. The government is mindful of the fact that Canada has been asked by all four parties to participate; Canada and the Canadian delegation are not the nominees, representatives or spokesmen of any one party or of one side in the Viet Nam struggle. The delegation will conduct itself accordingly.

As I told the House on January 24, the texts embodying the international observer arrangements are complex. I am sure those members of the House who have had an opportunity of studying the documents will agree with me that they are not only complex, but I think I can add without casting any reflection on them, they are a bit ambiguous also and, perhaps, deliberately so. We are continuing our careful study and analysis of them, but their full meaning and implication will only become clear in the light of our experience in seeking to apply them. Our publicly-stated conditions seem to have influenced those who wrote the agreements, but serious inadequacies remain.

It is important that the House be aware of what we consider to be the principal inadequacies of the international observer arrangements. One is that the agreements by themselves do not provide for a continuing political authority. It may be, of course, that the international conference envisaged in the agreements will repair that deficiency. I do not make this as a point of criticism particularly, I merely point out that it would have been perhaps impossible for the parties to the agreement to end the war in Viet Nam to have established an adequate international authority to which the supervisory commission should report without having the sort of international conference that is contemplated a few weeks hence. The government would have preferred the agreement and its supervision to come under the aegis of the United Nations. It is happy to note, however, that the Secretary-General of the United Nations will be invited to attend the international conference. This was one of the suggestions that we made very early, that it would help greatly if the Secretary-General could be there. If I may add a word, it would also suit us if he were the continuing political authority to which the supervisory commission might report.

Another deficiency is the obligation of unanimity in the commission's decisions and reports. It seems significant that the parties, wanting an effective commission, should none the less have provided that it must be subject to a rule of unanimity; in other words, to a veto. The effects of that rule are alleviated, as I pointed out before and as hon. members will have noted, by a qualified provision for reporting by individual members of the commission if unanimity cannot be achieved; but such reports would have no status as commission reports.

A further deficiency is that the new commission and each of its teams must act as a single body comprising representatives of all four members. This makes action by one, two or three national delegations impossible. This could turn out to be virtually an invitation to paralysis. We shall also be testing by experience the qualified provisions for the commission's freedom of movement.

[Mr. Sharp.]