

and Soviets wished to see the Commission re-established because they considered it as a way of curbing American influence and of strengthening their own. In the hope of preserving Laotian neutrality, Canada's diplomats sought other means of resolving the situation, working actively with UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.

External Affairs officials believed that the Vietnam Commission would continue to be needed "until the two countries resume relations or until the Commission is replaced by the United Nations in its role as a go-between".⁶ The new Canadian commissioner, Price Erichsen-Brown, at times found it difficult to maintain the appearance of neutrality, particularly in the face of such provocations as the North Vietnamese propaganda claim that a thousand political prisoners had been murdered in Saigon at the behest of the United States. From Ottawa, Assistant Under-Secretary of State John Holmes warned him against over-reacting on such matters. Holmes himself was infuriated by an American note soliciting Canadian help in augmenting the personnel of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). Holmes described this as "a rather disturbing document because of the blatant pressure tactics it uses." (Document 435). As the Americans admitted to Erichsen-Brown, they had used the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) to bring additional MAAG personnel into South Vietnam. However, the Commission had called for TERM to end its existence in June 1959. Reluctantly, Ottawa agreed that Erichsen-Brown should advocate an extension of TERM.

By far the most dramatic events of 1959 in Latin America were the sudden fall of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista on January 1 and the formation of a revolutionary government dominated by Fidel Castro. Canada was quick to recognize the new regime, but harsh reprisals against Batista's supporters soon led to doubts about its character and potential for stability. When Castro briefly visited Montreal in April, he was enthusiastically greeted by crowds of well-wishers, but his coming was less welcome to the Prime Minister and to External Affairs. From Havana, Canadian Ambassador Hector Allard had warned that "Castro is fast becoming [a] victim of his own verbosity and also a tool of communist elements surrounding him" (Document 460). Nevertheless, Canada's attitude to the new government and its leader was far from being entirely negative. The letter of instruction to Allard's successor, Allan Anderson, noted that Castro had come to power not through "a mere change of guard at the top" but rather through "a deeply popular revolution." Anderson was instructed to "display as much patience and understanding as are compatible with your functions and seek ways to reconcile Canadian political and economic interests with a revolution which cannot be stabilized until the deep grievances that produced it have been redressed" (Document 466). Throughout 1959, the Conservative government's overriding aim was to maintain Canada's traditional good relations with Cuba.

⁶ Unprinted Memo to DL2 from Far Eastern Division, June 10 1959, DEA 50052-40.