

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 Vietnam 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 nonetheless 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..., 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.

Another deficiency is that the parties have provided that each of the four commission countries should pay not only the salaries and allowances of their personnel but a fixed percentage of the general budget of the commission as well. This percentage turns out to be small, 2 per cent. The Government is not inclined to make an issue of paying it. But, however small, Canada has on several occasions expressed opposition in principle to paying any share of the general budget of the commission at all.