

Korean question of which the Assembly is seized. In the view of the Canadian Government a session on this subject--

That is on the general Korea question.

--might more usefully be reconvened at a later date in March or April.

We took that position because of developments in Panmunjom where steps are now being taken to bring about a resumption of the talks, and we hope that these steps will be successful within the next few days; because of developments in Berlin where Far Eastern questions have been put on the agenda; and because we came to the conclusion, after the inquiries we made, that it would not be possible, if the session opened on February 9, to restrict its deliberations merely to the action of India and the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission.

It should have been possible before now at Panmunjom to work out a satisfactory plan for the Korean political conference. Differences of viewpoint occurred at once, of course, as one would expect, between the negotiators from the two sides on this question. But on their face, none of those differences were impossible or even difficult of reconciliation. Indeed I think a solution might have been found if the communist representatives had not turned from negotiation to abuse, thus indicating that if their principals wanted a conference at all, they did not want one at that time. Hence the negotiations were suspended. As I have said, steps are being taken--which we hope will be successful--to bring about their resumption. The present situation in Korea is simply that there is no fighting, but there is no peace. Our servicemen in that area, while they remain at the alert, have for more than five months, however, been spared the tragic consequences of actual conflict. That is a blessing which we would all do well to remember.

One other issue out there has now been disposed of in the prisoners-of-war question. I do not need to go into details of that matter inasmuch as they will be familiar to most hon. members. We have taken the position as a government that the action of the United States commander in releasing and returning to civilian status the prisoners-of-war under his jurisdiction when they were returned to him by the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission was not only legally correct but morally sound and quite consistent with the terms of the armistice agreement itself. It seems to us that no other course was open to the United Nations commander at that time. Our own position in regard to this matter has been, I think, quite clear and consistent from the beginning. We have not believed nor do we now believe that any prisoner should be compelled by force to return to what was once his homeland. The provisions of the commission's terms of reference were drafted to prohibit enforced repatriation, and those of us who took part in the long, complicated and difficult negotiations to that end will recall this very clearly. But that prohibition would have little meaning if the only alternative facing a prisoner was indefinite captivity. Therefore the terms of reference in the armistice agreement made clear provision for the final release of prisoners to civilian status 120 days after their being placed in the custody of the commission. In the words of General Hull--

The plain intent of paragraph 11 of the terms of reference is to prevent either party to the agreement from frustrating the basic purpose of avoiding indefinite captivity for the prisoners.

We subscribe to that position.