

Viet Nam

al contacts with the U.S. Secretary of State on this subject and I was well aware of the views of his government. I wanted to have the views of others as well.

Accordingly, on March 13 a group of representative Canadians, although not unfortunately entirely representative of this House, left for a trip that was to put me in touch with both Vietnamese governments, the government of Laos, as well as some leading personalities in the so-called provisional revolutionary government of South Viet Nam and of the Pathet Lao movement. It was a very intense indoctrination into the facts of life in the ICCS and the attitudes and policies of the governments most directly concerned. I think all those who went came back with at least one impression in common: that is, that the ICCS was not performing the tasks assigned to it under the cease-fire agreement. I am also quite confident that most of my travelling companions would agree that this was in spite of the best efforts of the Canadian delegation to make it work. We have heard it from a sufficiently wide variety of sources to accept it as a matter of fact that had it not been for the energy and ingenuity of the Canadian delegation, even the setting up of the various bodies required by the agreement would not have taken place as soon as it did.

Although our visit left most of us with misgivings on the operation and success of the ICCS in carrying out its assigned tasks, we also had brought home to us that in some quarters this was seen as of very little consequence. We have been well aware for some time that not everybody shares Canada's concept of truce observation and supervision. There are other points of view with which we do not quarrel. We were also well aware that some of the interested parties at least, and many other countries such as Britain and Japan, were of the view that Canada should continue to serve on the ICCS regardless of whether it measured up to our standards. In all honesty, Mr. Speaker, I must say frankly that very few countries believed, in spite of our efforts to make our position known, that there was a real possibility that Canada would opt out of the ICCS.

My trip to Viet Nam has, I am sure, convinced some that we were indeed prepared to take this step if in our judgment the whole arrangement was unworkable and was not serving the cause of peace in Viet Nam. This had at least one salutary result in that we began to hear less about everything being lovely in Viet Nam and that the ICCS had the potential of becoming a really vital force in keeping the peace in Indo-China. Instead, we began to hear somewhat more convincing arguments that there was a totally different but equally vital role that bore no relation to our previous experience and is nowhere hinted at in the text of the agreement and protocols. Roughly stated, this is to provide an international presence as an indication of the continued involvement of the world community in the Viet Nam situation. Although the ICCS may not be necessary for the purposes of carrying out the agreement, its absence would be taken as an indication that the agreement lacked world support and consequently our withdrawal could become a further destabilizing psychological factor in a situation already very unstable.

There are two things I should like to say about this so-called psychological role. The first is that I am not

[Mr. Sharp.]

convinced that the ICCS does play such a part in the thinking of the Vietnamese. The second is that I do not believe that Canada and Canadians can be expected over any protracted period to play this part. So far as the North Vietnamese are concerned, I formed a clear impression that they regard the texts of the agreement and protocols as untouchable. They undoubtedly have their own interpretation of precisely what each article means and this interpretation adds up to either a peacefully reunified Viet Nam or one whose reunification by force would be justified on the grounds that the other parties had not "scrupulously adhered to the agreement". Needless to say, some of the other parties do not share this point of view.

To the government of the Republic of Viet Nam the agreements are seen as an opportunity to remove the North Vietnamese, if not from their territory, at least from the negotiating tables, and to give to them an opportunity to deal with their fellow South Vietnamese of the PRG direct and across the table without intervention from the north. The government in South Viet Nam believes that in a relatively short period of time it will know whether this possibility holds any prospect of leading to a negotiated settlement in South Viet Nam. It remains to be seen if this is a realistic aspiration.

It is no part of the responsibility of Canada as a member of the ICCS to judge the relative merits of these two positions. But it is now clear as it was not two months ago that all the Vietnamese parties will need a little time to demonstrate the feasibility of their solutions; not to bring them about, just to demonstrate feasibility. Once confidence has been established and if there has been some movement toward a political solution on either side's terms, the peace will no longer be as fragile as it is and the mere presence of an international commission will no longer be regarded as a vital part of the picture or as necessary to contribute to a solution. On the other hand, if neither side's view of a political solution is making any headway, we can look forward to a resumption of full scale hostilities regardless of the presence of any observer or supervisory body.

It is out of consideration for this new element and for the possibly far-reaching consequences of opting out now for which we would have to accept some responsibility that the government has decided not to exercise its option to withdraw after 60 days, even though it could justify doing so on the basis of the reasonable application of its announced criteria. On the other hand, our experience, both past and present, does not justify moving into acceptance of open-ended or unconditional participation. Consequently, the government proposes to inform the parties to the agreement that Canada would be prepared to continue to serve on the same basis as it does now for a further period of about 60 days, that is, until May 31—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sharp: —after which, unless there has been some substantial improvement or distinct progress has been made toward a political settlement, it will withdraw, giving a further 30-day grace period for the parties to find a successor. This means that Canada, unless there is a substantial improvement in the situation or some signs of