

*Supply—External Affairs*

gentleman mean that the answer was: We shall not give you a date precisely until such time as the bombing ceases, but we repeat our intention to talk when the bombing ceases? If that is the difference, it seems to me a refusal to cease the bombing on that kind of excuse is entirely reprehensible and I see no reason why the minister cannot say so.

Throughout his speech the minister failed to inform the committee about one important aspect of this issue—whether the United States is ready to negotiate not only with North Viet Nam but with the Viet Cong or its political arm, the National Liberation Front, a question which is of great importance to the other side in this war. I have not yet seen an unqualified statement by the United States that they would be willing to deal with the N.L.F. I have seen statements to this effect surrounded by qualifications and reservations but I have never heard a clear statement that they would meet with the N.L.F. at the negotiating table. Yet, as my leader reminds me, one of the difficulties is that the puppet government in South Viet Nam has stated publicly and formally that under no conditions would it be willing to discuss peace with representatives of the National Liberation Front.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs made another unhappy statement, even though I am sure he did not want to convey the impression which it conveyed to me. He said it was difficult to get North Viet Nam to agree to talk, and that now, because there had been considerable activity on the ground on the part of North Viet Nam and the Viet Cong, we could not expect the United States to be ready to act very quickly.

**Mr. Martin (Essex East):** I did not say that.

**Mr. Lewis:** That is what I understood the minister to say.

**Mr. Martin (Essex East):** Well, the hon. member had better read it again.

**Mr. Lewis:** I have not been able to read the text of the minister's statement. If he does not accept my interpretation he can correct me, now. I understood him to say that the situation is now more difficult as far as the United States is concerned because the action on the ground has gone against its forces in Viet Nam and it was obviously difficult to expect the Americans to give the appearance of yielding to military pressure.

[Mr. Lewis.]

What this adds up to is that when the fighting is going well for the Americans they impose conditions for talks which are unacceptable, and when things are not going well they decline to talk because to do so would appear to be yielding to military pressure. All this appears to put to nought the minister's attempt to walk an even road, to sit carefully on the fence between the two sides engaged in the conflict and make sure that when he condemns one side he gives equal condemnation to the other. It does not seem to me that the situation justifies such an approach. This is not to say that North Viet Nam has been as eager to step forward as many of us would have liked. As my hon. friend from Greenwood pointed out, a resolution approved at our party convention in July suggested that Hanoi ought to make its position clear. It seems to us, however, that when on January 1 of this year Hanoi said "stop the bombing and we will talk" the burden immediately shifted to the United States to do so, to cease bombing. I regret very much that the minister should have made a statement expressing continued hope that the bombing would stop while at the same time attempting to justify United States failure to change its policy in this respect.

I suggest that the most bewildering and the most shattering comment on this situation was made the other day by Secretary of State Rusk while giving evidence before the Senate committee on foreign affairs. I do not have the quotation before me, but when it was put to him that the Hanoi authorities had declared clearly on January 1 of this year that they would talk if the bombing ceased, the answer given by Secretary of State Rusk was: I do not believe the North Vietnamese are ready to surrender. This was the most significant comment one could find, because it gave an inkling of the kind of thinking the state department is engaged in, and the kind of thinking which is influencing United States policy in connection with this disastrous war. They do not accept opportunities to stop the bombing and start talking, or at least they will not take the risk of stopping the bombing. I point out that it could be resumed, unfortunately, if no results were forthcoming—not that I would support its resumption. From the viewpoint of the Pentagon, it could be renewed if the effort for negotiation failed.

What is preventing Washington from taking this first, essential step, and what is preventing our government and the Secretary of