

*The Address—Mr. Brewin*

denied the existence of any political prisoners or fixed their number at various times, as between 5,000 and 40,000. But the Saigon government has a simple way of dealing with this subject. It changes the records in respect to the political prisoners in its dossiers, designating them as common criminals. Thus, it is able to say there are no political prisoners.

Who are these prisoners? They are a varied group of students, including Buddhists, labour leaders, lawyers, peasants and opposition politicians. Few of them are communists or supporters of the National Liberation Front. The offence of many of them has been to seek a neutral solution, and pacification and reconciliation in Viet Nam. They constitute the element most able to carry out this pacification in accordance with the solemn terms of the Paris Peace Agreement. We have ourselves seen films from a respected British television company, *Granada*, showing interviews being conducted with prisoners, the victims of torture, and demonstrating the pitiable condition they were in.

Among the witnesses were a number of Canadians, and I refer in particular to Bishop Belanger of Valleyfield, Quebec; to Mr. Label, a law professor at the University of Quebec; to Mrs. Thelma Baker, a highly-respected member of the United Church, and, indeed, to my former colleague, Mr. Doug Rowland, the former member for Selkirk, whose loss to this House, I must add in parenthesis, I deeply deplore.

The reality of this picture of repression, torture, terror and death cannot be seriously contraverted. It may be overlooked, it may be minimized, but it exists. It seems to me that the words of John Donne, quoted by the Prime Minister as a guide to our foreign policy—"every man's death diminishes me"—are appropriate.

But what has the Canadian government done? I do not doubt for a moment the deep and real humanitarian concern of the Canadian government and its representatives. But I think they have failed to take the necessary steps that might improve the situation.

● (1600)

I must admit that the Canadian government, through the former secretary of state for external affairs, made diplomatic and private representations to the Saigon government, but it does not seem that these representations did any good. What he also did was to decline to accept representations made by a group of members of this House from almost all parties, many of them members of the Standing Committee on External Affairs, urging Canada to take a more active role in seeking a reference of the matter to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, or pressing for more effective inspection by the International Red Cross or other international agencies.

We had full discussions with the former minister but he decided that no action should be taken toward an international handling of the problem, and that no overt protest should be made. His basic ground for taking this view he said was that such action would not have effective results or be productive. He even went so far as to say that it might be counter productive.

I for one cannot accept, and I think hon. members of the House will not accept, this particular conclusion. To do so

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would undermine the international machinery for the protection of human rights set up through the United Nations. The treatment of political prisoners in Viet Nam disregards principles of international law, the universal declaration of human rights, the spirit of the United Nations charter, the Geneva convention and the Paris agreement.

It is not correct to say that treatment of its own nationals by any particular country is never a matter of international concern. When such treatment amounts to a gross violation of fundamental human rights, it does become an international issue. Apartheid in South Africa is clearly an illustration of this. To bypass the machinery of the United Nations is to ensure its futility. This is in face of the fact that one of the most promising international developments since the end of the last war has been the growth of international humanitarian law. The bypassing of this machinery is a poor service to the international community, to the United Nations, and to the development of the rule of law.

How can it be said that such a reference would be unproductive? This is a question that no one can answer with certainty. The fact remains that the regime in South Viet Nam is absolutely dependent on outside aid to maintain itself in existence, let alone achieve any degree of stability. The United States administration has continued to support the Thieu regime and to ignore its record of terror and torture. But more and more public opinion in the United States and in Congress, both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, is seeking to limit this aid. The finding of an international tribunal on this matter, I suggest, would be bound to have a substantial effect.

We urge the government to reconsider its views on this matter and to consult again with other sympathetic governments, such as Sweden, The Netherlands and Austria. I have no doubt there are many others, and I can assure the government that there are a great number of people in Canada who are deeply concerned that Canada demonstrate its humanitarian concern for more active steps to rouse world opinion. Abuse of fundamental human rights is all too common in the world today, but by far the largest scale example of this abuse is what is happening to political prisoners in South Viet Nam.

There are other aspects of our attitude toward Viet Nam that require re-examination. I was glad to hear that the government is extending reconstruction aid to North Viet Nam through a non-governmental agency which, if I heard alright, is the World Council of Churches. I hope this policy of treating all parts of Viet Nam, regardless of political philosophy, equally in matters of aid will be continued.

There is another development that requires to be watched. A determined effort is being made to use international organizations such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Development Agency, the International Monetary Fund, and internationally subscribed funds, including Canadian funds, to bolster the regime in South Viet Nam. This attempt has been going on for some time now but has not yet succeeded.

According to an article in *Le Monde* of September 21, a highly secret meeting under the aegis of the World Bank is