

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 27, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

VIET NAM—ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONTINUATION OF CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF CONTROL AND SUPERVISION FOR FURTHER 60 DAYS

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it has been a particular source of gratification to the government that the attitude Canada has adopted toward participation in the International Commission of Control and Supervision in Viet Nam has consistently enjoyed such a wide measure of public support. Our attitude toward a long term commitment and the conditions that we have attached to our service appear to be understood and accepted within this country and indeed to some extent outside it. This has been especially encouraging since the problem of our original participation and now the decision on whether or not to continue has within it the elements of a dilemma. The government was and still is highly conscious of the fact that there is no course of action it can choose which will meet all the demands being made upon us or command universal approval outside of this country. I venture to hope that the government's decision will, however, receive wide approval of this House and of the country and will not be considered unreasonable abroad.

Stated at its starkest, the dilemma lies in the desire of all Canadians to serve the cause of peace in Indo-China as long as, in the words of one hon. member, there is the slightest hope of a peaceful solution to the Viet Nam problem. On the other hand, the government is equally resolved that Canadians should not take part in a charade in which they will be required to supervise not a cease-fire but continuing and possibly escalating hostilities. From the purely Canadian point of view it is important that both aspects of the problem be squarely faced. Canada's reputation is closely associated with our contribution to international efforts to make peacekeeping a reality. Confidence in the feasibility of "peacekeeping" anywhere can only be maintained if activities bearing that description are not only effective but are seen to be effective by world opinion.

During the latter stages of the negotiation of the Paris agreements on Viet Nam, the government therefore informed the negotiating parties that it reserved its position on whether or not Canada would participate as a member in the ICCS until it had seen and studied the agreed arrangements to see if, in the light of our experi-

ence, the arrangements were workable. At the same time we presented to the negotiators a set of conditions which, if met, would have in our view made the peacekeeping arrangements for Viet Nam practical and credible. Also at the same time, we offered through the United States government some detailed proposals regarding the organization and practical arrangements of truce supervising in Viet Nam, based on the conclusions drawn from 19 years, experience in Indo-China.

I will not stretch the patience of the House by repeating our conditions which were given in full detail in my speech of January 5. I think it is fair to say that some of our points were accepted and incorporated in the documents that emerged. Nevertheless, when we saw the results of the negotiations as they were signed in Paris it also became clear that, in spite of the best efforts of the negotiators, the truce supervising arrangements left much to be desired. Moreover, one of our most important considerations, the establishment of a continuing political authority to which the ICCS and its members could report, was left for further consideration by an international conference to be held in Paris 30 days after the signature. As the House is already aware, I led the Canadian delegation to Paris at the end of February with proposals that would have given the ICCS the reporting authority which we considered necessary to its success.

• (1410)

In the meantime we had concluded that the other truce supervisory arrangements as laid down in the agreement left some doubt as to whether the Canadian criteria could be met. As I have said before on all possible occasions, this is no criticism of the agreements or of those who negotiated them. It is undoubtedly the best agreement that could have been negotiated in the circumstances and the results have, in spite of all, turned the course of world events in a new and more hopeful direction. Our reservations, therefore, are based simply on a Canadian appreciation that the task as outlined was not one well suited to Canadian methods and the Canadian temperament. In the final analysis we recognized, however, that what mattered most was the element of good faith on the part of all concerned and this could only be judged by trying to make the machinery work. It was for this purpose that we agreed to serve for an initial period of 60 days, to which an additional 30-day grace period was added to enable the parties to find a substitute in the event that we decided not to continue. That 60-day period ends on Thursday.

After returning from Paris I concluded that it would not be possible to reach a well-founded decision without having seen for myself the conditions in which the ICCS, and particularly our delegation, was operating, or having spoken directly with the leaders of the governments most directly concerned. I have had, as the House knows, sever-