

to the existing electoral law of 1951. In their view, the electoral law having been adopted during the period of hostilities in Laos contained provisions which should be adopted to the new circumstances of post-Geneva Laos and should answer to democratic criteria provided for in the Geneva Agreement. Accordingly they proposed several reforms the most important being the extension of voting rights to women on the same terms as men, the reduction of qualifying age for candidates from 30 to 25 and the formation of joint committees at all administrative levels to ensure free and fair elections.

5. The Royal Government maintained that the existing electoral law, being applicable to all Laotians, was not discriminatory against the Pathet Lao and that special conditions could not be envisaged for the latter. Further, they held that the only way to amend that law would be through action by the National Assembly after the election rather than before it. They also thought that the presumption of the Geneva Agreement was that the political settlement would take place within the framework of the electoral and constitutional laws then existing in Laos. They added that during June 1955 the National Assembly had postponed the date for general elections from 28 August to 25 December 1955 (the last date on which balloting could be held under the electoral law) and it was hoped that this extra time would be sufficient to arrive at a political settlement. The Royal Government, nonetheless, agreed to several modifications in the procedure for elections. They did not, however, accept the Pathet Lao suggestion that there should be mixed control committees and that full and effective restoration of the Royal administration in the northern provinces should only be considered after the general elections.

6. The Pathet Lao repeating their earlier declaration "to classify the two provinces under the supreme authority of the Royal Government" suggested that the administration of these two provinces should be entrusted by the Royal Government to the Pathet Lao authorities already functioning there, until after the general elections. The Pathet Lao maintained that the freedom and fairness of the elections would be best guaranteed by joint committees composed in equal proportion of the Pathet Lao and the other parties who would supervise the proceedings of the election at all levels. The Royal Government considered that these two proposals would leave the control over the conduct of the elections in the two provinces with the Pathet Lao and did not agree to either of them. The Government proposed that the restored administration in the northern provinces should be organized on a 50:50 basis, half the officials coming from the normal Royal Laotian Government administration and half from the Pathet Lao.

7. The Commission, although of the view that the Geneva Agreement did not make it directly responsible to effect the political settlement and being anxious not to be involved in the internal affairs of the Kingdom, exhorted the Parties on 14 August 1955 to speed up the progress of the negotiations. Nevertheless, the talks failed to make further progress and were suspended on 5 September 1955 without even discussing the last two items on the agenda.

8. Meanwhile, a meeting was arranged between the Prime Minister of the Royal Government, Katay D. Sasorith and the leader of the Pathet Lao, Prince Souphanouvong for 30 September 1955 at Xieng Khouang. Prince Souphanouvong later