

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 8, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MOVEMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS INTO LAOS— STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, hon. members are aware of the movement of South Vietnamese troops into Laos with the support of United States air and other elements based in South Viet Nam.

The government, of course, is concerned about any violation of Laotian neutrality and, as a signatory of the 1952 protocol of the Geneva Agreement on Laos and a member of the International Control Commission for Laos, we support fully the demand of Laotian Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma that the neutrality of Laos be respected by all parties. The disregard for Laotian neutrality by neighbouring states has been the subject of complaints to the International Control Commission from the Royal Laotian government for some years now and we have on several occasions within the International Control Commission supported commission activity to investigate these complaints.

Unfortunately we have had no success in persuading our colleagues on the International Control Commission to undertake investigations of the Laotian government complaints, the most recent of which were made in the middle of last year, in that instance against North Viet Nam. Despite this past failure we are, nevertheless, instructing the Canadian commissioner on the Laos International Control Commission to request an urgent meeting of the commission to discuss the situation in southern Laos and to undertake appropriate action to initiate an investigation of outstanding complaints of violations of the neutrality of Laos by whatever foreign forces.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, may I say a few words in response to the statement of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, as the hon. member for Fundy-Royal did not hear the whole statement and the Secretary of State for External Affairs did not give any prior indication of a statement on this subject.

● (2.10 p.m.)

I must say, first of all, that it does not seem to take things very far for Canada simply to continue to protest against the breaching of the neutrality of Laos by various

neighbours. This in itself may tend to make us feel a little more virtuous but it does not do anything to restore peace in Laos.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State for External Affairs has renewed his attempts to reactivate the efforts of the commission with a view to conducting an investigation. I am sure this move will certainly receive the support of my own party. However, the minister did not indicate in his remarks what effort, if any, is being made to generate support among other countries for this initiative. In other words, Sir, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has not made clear whether this is simply a request Canada has made and is leaving at that, or whether Canada is moving energetically on various fronts to generate support from other countries for the reactivation of the commission and the conducting of this kind of inquiry. The making of this request by itself may be helpful but if it is merely left there it may not amount to anything. It would be helpful to have the minister throw further light upon the question of precisely what the government of Canada intends to do.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, the invasion of Laos by South Vietnamese forces with the assistance of United States forces threatens a new escalation of this disastrous war and the piling of disaster upon disaster. I am glad the Secretary of State for External Affairs was able to tell us that Canada has protested, but I wonder whether protests are enough when both sides have repeatedly violated the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia and when the Geneva agreements have been torn to shreds by both sides in this conflict. I wonder whether it is consistent with the dignity of Canada any longer to remain a member of the International Control Commission which controls nothing in these countries. I wonder whether serious thought should not be given to Canada's withdrawal. I would be very much in favour of the reactivation of the International Control Commission if there were the slightest likelihood that it would be effective, but if not I would like to see it withdrawn.

I conclude by saying that while the United Nations has not always been effective it is the international forum for the conscience of mankind, and I wonder whether the repeated violation of the rules in Southeast Asia is not a matter which should once again be taken to the forum of the United Nations.

[Translation]

Mr. Romuald Rodrigue (Beauce): Mr. Speaker, the announcement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) of the invasion of Laos by South Vietnamese troops causes us great concern.

It all means that the population will have to suffer and make sacrifices because of this endless war, which has