

External Affairs in Parliament

STATEMENTS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

The purpose of this section is to provide a selection of statements on external affairs by Ministers of the Crown or by their parliamentary assistants. It is not designed to provide a complete coverage of debates on external affairs taking place during the month.

Foreign Policy Statement

The following statement was made in the House of Commons on January 31, 1956, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L. B. Pearson.

Work of the Armistice Commission in Indochina

... I should say at least a word about the work of the armistice commissions in Indochina, which was referred to earlier in the sitting this afternoon. In that area of the world Canadians continue to make an important contribution to peace through their work with these commissions. Our men—there are some 170 of them in that area, mostly from the Department of National Defence, members of the armed forces—have discharged their extremely difficult and trying duties with great credit to themselves and to their country. In one of the countries, there, namely Cambodia, we have reached the winding-up stage of the commission, and we have been able to reduce the strength of that commission. Elections have been held in that country, and as a result the commission and its members can leave Cambodia with the satisfaction which they must feel at the stability which has been achieved in a country so recently a victim of war.

In Laos, one of the other countries, the situation is not so good. Elections have also been held there, but the communist Pathet Lao forces, which are grouped in the northern provinces of that country, have refused to accept the Laotian Government or the authority of that government and to take part in the election. Hence no reduction there has been found possible either in the numbers of the commission or in its activities up to the present time.

Political Aspects

So far as Vietnam is concerned—and that is probably the most important of the three countries—the military phases of the armistice work have been completed and with little disturbance. I think the commission deserves a good deal of credit for that result. The political aspects, however, present a less satisfactory picture. Little progress has been made in that country toward the national elections visualized by the Geneva conference, and which are scheduled to take place in July of this year. If they do not take place it is hard to say what effect that failure will have on our obligations in the commission.

This work in Indochina is arduous and difficult, as I have said, and it imposes a heavy burden on the armed forces of our country and upon the Department of External Affairs. We are most anxious to complete it at the earliest possible date. Nevertheless we shall not abandon that work so long as we are convinced that it is making an important contribution to peace.