

Foreign Policy

make any progress in delineating the distances between the parties and seeing whether or not a formula could be reached which might at least bring about preliminary discussions between the parties involved in this war. I may say that on his first visit Mr. Ronning did bring back information which I believe was important, information which has since been partially made public but which I think, while not furthering the ultimate cause which he and the government had in mind, nevertheless has assisted us to understand the difficulties and perhaps the reasons for the inflexible position which both parties seemingly have taken in their declared positions.

Let no one say that the commission or the Canadian government has not been engaged in trying to bring about peace. The record is there to judge when the time comes for its full exposure, and I venture to suggest that Canadians will not be ashamed of our efforts through this instrument to try to bring about peace in this situation.

We did not stop with these endeavours only. I went to the Soviet union and to Warsaw last November in connection with the war in Viet Nam. If I am not able to disclose fully the nature of the conversations which I had, it is not because these were not directed toward the kind of objective that we had in mind in the commission or toward the kind of objective that we have in mind now. Right from the beginning our position with regard to the war in Viet Nam has been that we wanted a cease fire. Right from the beginning we firmly declared our view that a military solution alone to this problem was neither desirable nor practicable. When a year and a half ago the unaligned nations made an appeal, Canada was the first country to join in that appeal. It will be recalled that we urged the United States to accept certain positions with regard to the 17-point appeal made by the unaligned nations.

My hon. friend says he is concerned about the war in Viet Nam. Is there anyone in this house who is not concerned about the war in Viet Nam? Is there anyone in Britain, in France, in Belgium, in the Scandinavian countries or in the United States who is not concerned? Governments which have particular information on certain aspects of this problem are not on that account excused from being concerned about the war in Viet Nam, about its escalation and expansion, about the dangers of further escalation and the dangers of involving other countries and of creating situations that could add to the intensity of the present conflict.

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

I am not asking for any sympathy from this house. I have been here too long to know the unwisdom of that kind of tactic. But I will say that the house has the right to know that as a member of this government charged with this matter there has not been anything that has occupied my time more or that of the Department of External Affairs than trying to achieve some success in the areas about which I have been talking in the past few minutes, and this has been shared by my colleagues in the government. No man has been more devoted to the cause of peace in his lifetime than the Prime Minister and it is only to be expected that any government of which he is the head would, as would a government headed by any other hon. member in the house including my right hon. friend, be anxious to bring about peace. We do not help to bring about that kind of condition when we charge, knowing full well that the government cannot take any other course, that the government is unwilling to give parliament and the public information, and when any hon. member who makes that charge knows perfectly well, if he knows anything about the conduct of foreign policy, that for the government to take any other course than the one it has followed would be irresponsible and would not be calculated to bring about peace.

• (4:40 p.m.)

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian government is concerned about the course of events in Viet Nam. If we do not say publicly exactly how we feel on every aspect of this problem, that does not mean that quiet diplomacy denies us the right or the opportunity of telling even our friends, the United States, how we feel on particular matters.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would the minister allow a question? Would he say whether he agreed with the view expressed by his colleague, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Gordon), that the United States has no moral or strategic justification to be in Viet Nam?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): My right hon. friend should at least accord me the privilege today of appreciating that I am trying to deal with this subject in as objective and non-political a manner as I possibly can. The right hon. gentleman and I have been in this house almost longer than anyone else, and I do not think he would object to my saying this. He has had a distinguished career, but I do not think he has added to the distinction of that career by using foreign policy so often as a means of promoting political advantage.