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Official Defends Canadian Role In Taking Messages to Hanoi

By EDWARD COWAN
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OTTAWA, June 17 — The Canadian Government defended itself today against accusations that in transmitting messages from Washington to Hanoi in 1964-65 it had been "an errand boy bearing threats of an expanded war" and that it had compromised its role as a member of the International Control Commission.

In a statement read to the House of Commons, Mitchell W. Sharp, the Minister of External Affairs, said that the Canadian Government did not know in advance of any intention on the part of the United States to bomb North Vietnam.

"The messages we carried were couched in general terms and related to the possible consequences for the North Vietnamese Government of con-

tinued activities in South Vietnam," Mr. Sharp said.

He asserted that it was implicit in Canada's role as a member of the commission, whose duties are to implement the 1954 Geneva accords concerning Indochina, "that Canada should endeavor to promote a dialogue between the main parties to the conflict."

"The North Vietnamese made it abundantly clear that they did not regard our activity as in any way improper or inconsistent with our I.C.C. role," Mr. Sharp said.

The controversy concerning Canada's activities as a member of the commission followed publication in The New York Times of secret Pentagon papers on the development of the war in Vietnam. One document gave details of the points to be communicated to Hanoi by J. Blair Seaborn, a Canadian diplomat assigned to the commission.

In an editorial this morning, The Globe and Mail of Toronto declared disapprovingly: "Our man carried a clear threat to the North Vietnam Government. We took on the role of a lesser earl of the king delivering an ultimatum to the enemy."

The newspaper, which is widely distributed in the country, said Canada had "abandoned the responsibility to remain neutral."

'Errand Boy' Charge

In the Commons, a member of the opposition Progressive Conservative party, Gordon Fairweather, said Canada had been "the errand boy bearing threats of an expanded war."

Andrew Brewin of the New Democratic party said Canada had put herself in a position of "subservience to the American point of view."

Mr. Sharp recalled that Paul Martin, who was Minister of External Affairs in the Liberal Government of former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, had spoken to the House of Mr. Seaborn's role on June 10, 1965.

He said the decision to have Mr. Seaborn convey Washington's views was reached after Mr. Martin, Mr. Pearson and Dean Rusk, then the United States Secretary of State, met in the spring of 1964.

Mr. Sharp said that Mr. Martin had agreed that Mr. Seaborn "might be instructed to probe what was in the minds of the leaders in Hanoi and help to dispel any misunderstanding they might have as to the future course the United States intended to follow, that is, that the Americans were not thinking of pulling out of Vietnam and were prepared to increase their commitment there if this were considered necessary."

Canada's motive "was to try to promote a peaceful settlement," Mr. Sharp said.