

Canada Quits a Farce

The decisions by the Canadians to quit their peace-keeping job in Vietnam is a rare touch of reality in a situation shot through with pretense.

Canada have given both sides 60 days to find some other nation to serve on the International Commission for Control and Supervision.

But why bother? If the Canadians can't make the ICCS work, no one else can. They brought the ideal spirit to the task.

The Poles were the most knowledgeable members of ICCS; they loaded their team with experts on Vietnam. But they were also the most doctrinaire. Never mind what the evidence indicated, they voted the Communist line.

The Hungarians were doctrinaire, too, when the chips were down, but their dogmatism was diluted by a natural inclination to be reasonable.

The Indonesians were pretty much reflex anti-Communists, as doctrinaire in their own way as the Hungarians and Poles.

Only the Canadians came as impartial referees, intent on calling the shots as they saw them. And they just naturally took the lead in ICCS activities.

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I REMEMBER a Colonel Morrison, a lanky, pipe-smoking type who had flown Lancasters against Germany in World War II. He was at ease with Americans, but he made it clear he wasn't their partisan.

He had a good way with newsmen, asking them more questions than they asked him and listening attentively to the answers. This was more than flattery. The ICCS hadn't yet been able to deploy its observers, but newsmen were getting around the country. A session with Morrison was like a reconnaissance debriefing. You wound up telling him more than you realized you knew.

I remember another Canadian, a war-rant officer called Scotty, who tried to smuggle me into the ICCS compound. Since the ceasefire terms bestowed diplomatic status on him, he should have been able to

invite me openly. But the South Vietnamese guards had different orders. They unceremoniously threw me out, while Scotty stood there, embarrassed, indignant but immobilized.

If the Canadians made any mistake in Vietnam it was their failure to insist from the outset that both sides respect the letter of the truce agreement.

But it probably wouldn't have made any difference. Henry Kissinger's peace machinery was a Rube Goldberg structure of teetering councils and commissions, and no one in Saigon really expected it to function.

Yet when the Canadians warned that if it didn't function they would leave, the Americans didn't take them seriously. Pretense had become such an integral part of our Vietnam policy — first the pretend victory and then the pretend peace — that our officials assumed the Canadians were talking make-believe too.

To me it's significant that the Canadian decision to pull out came just after the terms of the latest Kissinger-Tho talks were leaked in Saigon. Again the field commanders will be told to stop shooting. Again the Rube Goldberg councils will set deadlines for agreeing to agree. It's the same old ritual of pretense starting all over again.

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AS A SYMBOL of how unrealistic the Kissinger-Tho talks have become, there is even a new pledge of inviolability for the demilitarized zone.

The DMZ has ceased to exist. the real boundary now is the Thach Han River, 30 miles north of Hue.

I spent two days on the south bank of the Thach Han with a Canadian truce observer, watching Communist POWs crossing to the opposite shore, where a giant Viet Cong flag billowed in the breeze.

It was obvious to everyone present that the land north of the river now belonged to the Communists, no matter what the truce terms said. The sensible Canadians want no part of a peace mission that requires them to ignore such realities.