The painful fact which emerges from a close study of reactions at home and abroad to the Johnson peace offensive is that no one really believes in its sincerity. At home the hawks see it as a clever maneuver to disarm the peace movement. Abroad it is generally regarded as the prelude to a wider war. The Johnson Administration had a simple way to correct this impression. A declaration that it was prepared to accept the National Liberation Front as one of the parties to a negotiation would have indicated that the U.S. was serious in its search for peace. Even a European paper as far right as Belgium’s Catholic-conservative *Libre Belge* put its finger on the continued unwillingness to deal with the NLF as "the weak point of the American position." (*Washington Star*, Jan. 4). This does not require acceptance of the NLF as sole representative of the South Vietnamese; the Saigon government and the neutralist Buddhists are also entitled (on the Laotian model) to a place. But to negotiate the settlement of any war, one must deal with the enemy one is fighting.

### The Same Promises We Broke Before

The President, in one of the 14 points being circulated by the State Department at home and abroad, is quoted as saying cryptically that if North Vietnam stopped its "aggression," the "Viet Cong would not have difficulty being represented." But if this is true, why not say openly and unambiguously that we will negotiate with them? Instead Secretary Rusk in his December 30 interview with Canadian Broadcasting Company asked the Viet Cong to "lay down their arms, accept amnesty, engage in free elections." They did lay down their arms in 1954, they were guaranteed an amnesty in the Geneva agreement. Despite this, many were executed and others thrown into concentration camps. The promised elections were never held. How often can you sell the Brooklyn Bridge to the very same sucker? The fact is that the Administration has indicated here and in Saigon that it does not intend to agree to any settlement which would give the NLF or the Viet Cong any voice in the future government of South Vietnam. That would, by the Administration’s definition, still leave South Vietnam open to "subversion" or "indirect aggression." But "unconditional discussions" hedged by the condition that we will not deal directly with those we are actually fighting nor make any concession to them is tantamount to a demand for their surrender. This is why the peace offensive does not look real even to our friends and allies.

One of the countries visited by the emissaries Mr. Johnson has flown out dramatically all around the globe was Canada. Last April its Prime Minister Pearson was one of the first to suggest a pause in the bombardment of North Vietnam as a prelude to negotiations. One would have expected him to be especially pleased by the new pause and the peace offensive. Ottawa was impressed neither by the visit of McGeorge Bundy to Ottawa nor by the 45-minute telephone conversation between President and Prime Minister in which it culminated, perhaps because Mr. Bundy had not been persuasive enough. *Le Monde*’s Ottawa correspondent reported (Jan. 1) that the Canadian government afterward "minimized the importance of the surprise visit" and saw no change in Washington’s policy. That dispatch revealed another instance of the way in which our top officials seem more anxious to foreclose than to find loopholes for negotiation. Blair Seaborn, Canada’s representative last year on the International Control Commission.

---

*Though all Goldberg would say at a UN press conference Jan. 5 as we go to press is that the Viet Cong “point of view” would be represented at the conference table.*

---

*(Continued on Page Two)*
sion and one of our chief intermediaries in talking with Hanoi last year, took part in the talks with Mr. Bundy. One of the things we wanted him to find out for us was whether the famous Four Points were actual conditions for negotiations. Last June Mr. Seaborn reported that he could obtain no precise response. *Le Monde's* dispatch from Ottawa discloses that the Canadian diplomat gathered the impression "that the evasive responses of Hanoi indicated the desire of the North Vietnamese leaders to sound out the possibilities of compromise directly with American representatives." The U.S. chose to place the more pessimistic interpretation on Hanoi's attitude, perhaps because as Ambassador Lodge was saying about that time (*Meet the Press*, May 23) negotiations would be "disastrous" and Mr. Johnson's offer of "unconditional discussions" at Baltimore a few weeks earlier was only intended to put the onus on the other side.

Two "Signals" We Ignored

Though Mr. Rusk claims to have had his antenna alert for months to any possible "signal" from the other side, this and many other signals for diplomatic exploration and negotiation have been ignored. In the wake of the Seaborn inquiries, there were two other signals from Hanoi last year which the State Department brushed aside. These have since come to the attention of a group of newspapermen here, including myself, but have not been discussed in print. The first signal was the formal response given by Ho Chi Minh in *Le Monde* last August 14 to questions put him by the noted French historian of Vietnam, M. Philippe Devillers, who seemed to commute last year between Washington and Hanoi. Last July, according to *Le Monde*, "certain American sources" had decided seriously to study the Four Points. The questions Ho answered sounded like requests by Washington at elucidation. Two important points came out of Ho's answers. One was that he was not insisting on immediate reunification, but was prepared to accept indefinitely the existence of an autonomous South Vietnam if neutral and if it maintained "fraternal" relations with the North. The other was that Ho was not demanding immediate U.S. troop withdrawal and was prepared to negotiate "the conditions and guarantees" of U.S. disengagement if Washington gave "tangible proof" that it accepted the principles embodied in the Four Points.

A second move which Hanoi regarded as a peaceful signal came several weeks later. Secretary Rusk had said several times that the U.S. would stop bombing the North if it would make some comparable "de-escalation" such as withdrawing the 325th Division from South Vietnam. On September 21, Richard Dushman in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and Bernard Gwertzman in the *Washington Star* disclosed on the basis of a briefing that U.S. intelligence reported there had been no contact in recent weeks with the 325th Division. The briefing—significantly—was not in the State Department, which at once knocked down these stories. The Department's spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey admitted that the 325th had not been "engaged in activities," according to the *Washington Star* Sept. 24, but said they were "believed to be still there." Just what made the Department believe they were still there was not explained; perhaps Mr. Rusk's antenna detected them rustling in the jungle foliage. All this was very confusing at the time, and the Department was given the benefit of the doubt; now it appears on reliable authority that the 325th was withdrawn at the time. Washington's failure to keep its promise and reciprocate by calling off the bombing was regarded as proof of insincerity by Hanoi.

This record, like Washington's treatment of the Four Points, can hardly create confidence. These Four Points, Ho said in his cable to Pope Paul are merely a restatement of the 1954 Geneva pact. Washington disagrees only on Point 3. Though
the press has been encouraged to report Point 3 as handing over South Vietnam to the Viet Cong, all it says is that "the internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the program of the NLF without any foreign interference." In the memorandum prepared for Vice President Humphrey's trip abroad it is said that this "would require the imposition of the program of the liberation front upon South Vietnam, whether the South Vietnamese wanted it or not." This reflects the State Department's genius for distortion. The NLF program calls for election of "a new National Assembly through universal suffrage" and for the establishment of free press, opinion and assembly. After 12 years of financing dictatorship in South Vietnam, the U.S. government does not enhance its reputation by trying to make it appear that the NLF program is somehow undemocratic. The NLF program is so broad and general in its principles of democracy, land reform, neutrality and amnesty as to allow ample room for honorable negotiation and guarantees of a free regime if we were looking for real negotiation.

Preparing For Wider War

The peace offensive seems to be a pantomime with wholly different purposes. The bill for the Vietnamese war is growing by huge increments. Last May Mr. Johnson had to ask Congress for a supplementary appropriation of $700,000,000; in July he went back for an extra $1.7 billion. Now it is disclosed that Mr. Johnson must ask for another $12 to $13 billion more for the current fiscal year to meet the rising costs of the war. This is how much the war is costing us in South Vietnam. It will cost many times more when extended—"as we are on the verge of doing—to Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, not to speak of China. It was a political necessity to make every effort for peace before presenting a bill to Congress. It's not just the peace offensive, it's the fiscal conservatives who are worrying the Administration. This little war is adding up to a very large one.

Abroad the peace offensive must be seen against the background of the reports by Rusk and McNamara to NATO in December. The accounts filtering out of that meeting in Paris made them sound like the apocalyptic Air Force bomber Generals, ready to take on China. As Le Monde said Dec. 18 the way they talked of the Chinese peril indicated Washington had little illusion about the possibility of a peaceful settlement and was embarking on a war of great dimensions "without knowing where escalation would stop." Our surprise, looking at Johnson's various jet-age angels, is that Humphrey's mission was to drum up Asian troops, Harriman's to warn the East European Communists to keep hands off; McNamara's and Rusk's to shake our NATO allies out of their indifference to our obsession with China, and Goldberg's to try and persuade the Pope of the purity of our intentions as we move giddily along the brink.