

Composition of Commission

Commenting on the Soviet announcement from the Canadian point of view, Mr. Nesbitt emphasized that Canada

had always considered the composition of the Disarmament Commission and its Sub-Committee to be in question. One month earlier our Prime Minister, speaking of the Disarmament Sub-Committee, had said in the assembly:

We consider that a salutary effect might be achieved by securing the participation of other powers; they may be capable of rendering assistance in the processes of seeking an agreement that we have not been able to achieve. But let me say this: Geography alone should not be the basis for choosing additional members, for all members are not equally equipped to contribute towards the agreement for which we all devoutly hope.

Some of our allies had said in the course of the debate that there should be no expansion either of the Commission or its Sub-Committee, but we had been careful in our concluding remarks on November 4 last to keep our position open on this matter . . .

Describing further initiatives taken by the Canadian Delegation with a view to meeting this situation, Mr. Nesbitt continued as follows:

Therefore, on November 6 we made only a guarded statement in the Political Committee just before the votes were taken. At that time I made certain remarks and I should like to quote what I said. I do so only because I think the remarks are pertinent to the remarks I am making at the moment. I said:

We do not believe that the size or composition of the Disarmament Commission and the Sub-Committee has been a major obstacle in the way of agreement. But, by the same token, we do not believe that a matter of some alteration in the United Nations disarmament bodies need inevitably be allowed to stand in the way of at least the opportunity for further negotiation . . . Our fundamental approach to a possible change in disarmament bodies was defined by Prime Minister Diefenbaker in his statement in the general debate on September 23. He made it clear at that time that we were certainly not opposed in principle to associating other countries with these disarmament talks if there was any chance that this would improve the prospects of success. If, however, the very possibility of continuing the negotiations at all is now jeopardized, then the willingness to accept some reasonable adjustment is all the more essential.

As we expected, this statement was warmly welcomed by many countries, including some of our NATO allies. Very shortly thereafter our allies on the Sub-Committee indicated to us that they would not now be opposed to reasonable expansion of the Disarmament Commission . . .

At first it was agreed that an addition of five new members might be reasonable. Then immediately rumours of our negotiations began to spread, as they do down there, and many countries indicated that if there were to be any Commission expansion then their own region, or more particularly their own country in some cases, should not be excluded. Thus, our Sub-Committee allies themselves asked that not five but ten countries should be added. These ten were Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Czechoslovakia, India, Italy, Tunisia and Yugoslavia.

It was agreed that if such a resolution for Commission expansion were to be effective it should unite rather than divide the Assembly, or at least that part of it outside the Soviet bloc. Therefore, along with our allies we had been in constant consultation with India and with other leaders of the uncommitted nations. We had also had some contact, I may add, with the Soviet Delegation who had made it clear that they would not commit themselves to any resolution in advance. At times we seemed on the point of finding a list of countries which would be acceptable to all the powers concerned. However, after some days of negotiation it became more and more clear to the Canadian Delegation that, regardless of our own views, it would be very hard to get prior agreement between all of our Sub-Committee allies on the one hand and the major uncommitted countries on the other. Therefore, in order to get the ship launched, so to speak, together with Japan we introduced a resolution calling upon the Assembly "to enlarge the Disarmament Commission by the addition of ten member states which, for the first year, from 1 January, 1958, to 1 January, 1959, shall be"—and then followed the ten countries I have previously mentioned. Our tactic on this occasion was, in the words of an eminent statesman of the past, to wait and see the reaction of the Assembly to this resolution.