

No. 53/57

FORCED LABOUR

Text of a statement given on November 25, 1953, in the Third Committee of the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, by the Canadian Representative, Mrs. A.L. Caldwell, on agenda Item 69 - Evidence of Existence of Forced Labour.

NOTE: Voting results and text of the resolution adopted are given at the end of the statement.

The Canadian Delegation supports wholeheartedly the resolution now before us. In our opinion it should be clearly recognized for what it is, a resolution of a procedural character, underscoring the urgency of the problem of forced labour, and requesting the ECOSOC and ILO to give it the high priority which it deserves at their forthcoming meetings. This is obviously the only kind of resolution which the Third Committee can consider at this stage, since the report of the Ad Hoc Committee is not itself officially before us, nor are the findings of the ECOSOC and ILO available for consideration by the General Assembly. These factors make it unnecessary and in fact unwise, in our opinion, for detailed debate to take place at this session either on the contents of the report, or on the more controversial parts of the Ad Hoc Committee's findings. There are of course certain facts which have emerged in the course of the last few years with regard to forced labour, facts which are now beyond dispute, if not beyond controversy. These facts do not depend on the conclusions or findings of the Ad Hoc Committee. They emerge clearly from the legislation and from the policies of the governments concerned.

It is, for example, a simple statement of fact that "forced labour camps" exist in Czechoslovakia. Section 36 of Act No. 86 of 1950 (the Penal Code) of that country, entitled "Committal to Forced Labour Camps" expressly refers to and recognizes the existence of "forced labour camps" as places to which persons 18 years of age and over, after completing their full sentence of temporary deprivation of liberty, may be committed for additional periods of so-called "re-education" for as long as three months to two years (pp. 228-229 of Ad Hoc Committee Report: see also p.34).

It is of course true that in October 1952 these "forced labour camps" were officially given a new name. They are now officially known as "transitional camps", whatever that means. I do not of course know why it was that the Czech authorities decided to make this change of name: it may or may not have had something to do with the interest now being taken by the United Nations in the problem of forced labour. Whatever the reasons for the change of name I can do no better than to recall the words of the representative of the U.S.S.R. the other day when he reminded this Committee that "A rose by any other name smells just as sweet".