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External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 54/47/UN9/24 FORCED LABOUR

Text of a statement on December 11, 1954, by Mrs. K.G. Montgomery, Canadian Representative in the Third Committee of the ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, on agenda item 30 - Forced Labour: Report of the Economic and Social Council

Note: The text of the resolution adopted by the Committee and the results of the voting are included in the end of the statement.

As one of the sponsors of the resolution before the Committee, the Canadian Delegation would like to express once again its genuine concern over the existence of forced labour in many areas of the world. The evidence which has been collected by the Ad Hoc Committee in this matter is shocking. The Committee's inquiries have revealed that facts relating to systems of forced labour exist and that those government which make use of forced labour, whether as a means of political coercion, punishment for holding or expressing political views or for important economic purposes, are committing a contravention of the obligations and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. The Committee also found that apart from the physical suffering and hardship involved, what made the system of forced labour "most dangerous to human freedom and dignity is that it trespasses on the inner convictions and ideas of persons to the extent of forcing them to change their opinions, convictions and even mental attitudes to the satisfaction of the state"; moreover, it was bound to lower gradually the status and dignity of even the free workers in countries where it was applied.

As far as we know this evidence has not been wiped out and the facts pointed out by the distinguished Delegate of the United States this morning give us additional proof of the existence of forced labour! We have been informed during this debate as indeed during previous debates of the progress made in certain countries in certain fields of activity. But the data which was given to us in these instances had little if any relevance to the points under discussion. Mr. Chairman, my country is also one in which great strides have been made in recent decades in many fields. Our manufacturing industries have made tremendous progress recently and our national revenue has reached a level which could hardly be dreamed only a few years ago. We also like to think that we have made a useful contribution to the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. And, partly as a result of all that, our cultural life is making substantial progress. But we do not regard any of this as evidence that there is no forced labour within our borders. Nor do we consider that the existence of comic strips in many countries including Canada is proof that forced labour exists there.