

May 5 the Bundestag of the German Federal Republic, adopted resolutions of protest, appealed to the U.S.S.R. for an explanation and to the Western Powers for an approach to the Soviet Union. The Japanese Diet went further: it requested the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan to appeal to "the justice and public opinion of the world through the United Nations". When further representations by the Allied Powers had failed to elicit a reply from the U.S.S.R., Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States placed the matter before the Fifth Session of the General Assembly.

The Assembly's debate centred on a proposal jointly sponsored by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, which would have provided for the creation of a United Nations Commission of Prisoners of War. In spite of the moderate tone adopted by the co-sponsors, it soon became clear that the Soviet Delegation was not approaching the problem in a spirit of compromise. The Soviet Representative categorically denied that German or Japanese prisoners of war were still detained in the U.S.S.R. and denounced the three sponsors for their alleged detention of thousands of prisoners for purposes of slave labour. At the same time a number of delegations feared that the wording of the joint resolution, which referred specifically to the prisoners of war still held in the U.S.S.R., might provoke the Soviet Government into an even more intransigent attitude. To allay these fears, the sponsors produced a watered-down version of their proposal which incorporated a number of modifying amendments, and amounted to little more than an innocuous expression of concern that certain countries had not repatriated the prisoners of war which had been held by them. The resultant resolution was adopted by 43 votes to 5, with 8 abstentions.

Under this resolution the Assembly called upon the governments concerned to submit certain information on prisoners of war by April 30, 1951. In a further provision, the Secretary-General was requested to appoint a commission of three qualified and impartial persons chosen by the International Red Cross. This commission, which is to be convened after April 30, 1951, is to examine the information made available by member governments, and report the results of its work to the Secretary-General for transmission to member states. The governments concerned are urged to co-operate fully with the commission and to grant right of access to their respective countries and to areas in which prisoners are detained.

Since Canada had not been involved in past negotiations with the U.S.S.R. on this subject, and was not included among the occupying powers either in Germany or Japan, the Canadian Delegation did not take a leading part in the debate. It was, however, in full agreement with the original draft resolution, and voted in favour of the modified version which was finally adopted, even though there seems little prospect of its leading to a constructive solution of this problem.