

CANADA AT THE UNITED NATIONS

MR. MAYRAND'S STATEMENT: Following is partial text of the statement on the question of refugees and displaced persons, made by Léon Mayrand, representative of Canada, in the Third Committee of the United Nations' General Assembly, on May 12, 1949:

"Unfortunately, -- or rather fortunately for this Committee -- I have not had sufficient warning of the precise nature of this debate to prepare a 38-page statement. Yet, since the honourable delegate of Poland has made direct references to my country, I feel that I should offer at least a brief answer.

"Canada has been a strong and consistent supporter of the International Refugee Organization and of its Preparatory Commission ever since their inception. My country is one of the larger contributors to the IRO budget and has received, and is still receiving, its fair share of non-repatriable refugees and displaced persons.

"I gather from the references which have been made to Canada by the Polish delegate today and by the representatives of Poland, Byelorussia and the Soviet Union during the Eighth Session of the Economic and Social Council (at which we were not present) -- I gather from those statements that they are attempting to show that refugees and displaced persons who came to Canada are being employed at lower wages than those paid to locally-hired help for similar work; that their working conditions are unsatisfactory; and that, in general, they are being discriminated against and exploited by their Canadian employers. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth; and the real facts, if these gentlemen are genuinely interested in knowing them, are, of course, readily available. I wonder if the true facts about working conditions in the countries which these representatives come from are also available. As a matter of fact, I know from experience that they are not available. It is clear to my delegation, Mr. Chairman, that statements of this nature are only made in an effort to confuse the true issues and to discredit the International Refugee Organization. I know that no one who objectively examines the facts will be fooled for one instant.

"Permit me to quote from the summary record of the 267th meeting of the Economic and Social Council. Mr. Tsarapkin, the Soviet representative is reported as saying:

"The fate of the unhappy refugees would, therefore, be forced labour in Brazil, Canada, Latin America and elsewhere, where uprooted from their native soil, they would remain without any rights."

"Well, if forced labour means that a person must work to earn a living and is thereby forced to get up in the morning and to rest at night, then that assertion is correct. If volunteering to go to Canada instead of to return to a place where the people are the tools of the state instead of the state being the servant of the people; if this is the real meaning of being 'uprooted from their native soil', then that assertion too is correct. If, 'without any rights' means freedom to leave the country whenever one wishes, freedom to marry whomever one chooses, freedom to read whatever one wishes and to listen to whatever radio program one wants to, then that assertion too is a correct one. On the basis of all this, the question as to whether the refugees coming to Canada are or are not 'happy' is one which the refugees themselves should be in a better position to answer than the representatives of Poland and the Soviet Union. Or perhaps the Polish and Soviet delegations are in possession of secret information on the state of happiness of the 64,860 misguided displaced persons who since April, 1947 were 'uprooted' from their native soil and 'forced' to come to Canada. I know I can say, with all the sincerity at my command, that the Canadian Government and indeed all Canadian citizens are sparing no effort to see that these unfortunate people, many of whom have already suffered so much, find in Canada a home and all that the word signifies.

"The Canadian Government adheres to the principle that refugees and displaced persons should not be forced to return to their countries of origin unless they are willing so to do. If they are so willing, then every assistance should be given them to return to their homes. This, we believe, is the policy which has been carried out faithfully by the International Refugee Organization, and any attempt to discredit this very worthwhile and most necessary humanitarian organization surely does not deceive anyone. The purposes behind these attempts are well-known. They are foreign to the principles, purposes and spirit of the United Nations as expressed in its Charter...."