



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 53/12

THE KOREAN QUESTION

Statement by the Acting Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Paul Martin, made in the First Committee, March 5, 1953.

"To bring the fighting in Korea to an end and to move forward into the positive phases of reconstruction and peaceful settlement is still the greatest challenge which faces the United Nations." If I do not follow in great detail the statement to which we have just listened, it is because I am afraid that this presentation -- the first, I understand, of the Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia -- really did not address itself to the issue that has brought us here at this particular moment.

My first sentence was an assertion made by the President of the General Assembly, after the adjournment of the first part of the seventh session last December. That statement, it seems to us, should still be our guide. Our discussion should not be obscured by invective and attempts, by raising extraneous issues, to divert attention from the immediate central purpose of our deliberations. Declarations which do not contribute to this end are not constructive, and those which hinder it are worse.

Certainly it is not incumbent upon this Committee to listen to hypothetical speculations and predictions, without factual basis, about the future general course of United States policy. This is the type of thing about which we should complain, for it distorts and confuses the issue. I also think that at this point one could emphasize that it is not the function of this Committee to consider the domestic political alignments of the United States or of any other country.

I must say that I was surprised to hear the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Mr. Vyshinsky, the other day, attempting to draw a distinction between the so-called "ruling classes" and the people of the United States. That distinction does not of course exist, and it is a conception which would not even have occurred to a spokesman of any democratic country. I am afraid that Mr. Vyshinsky, in the excitement of the moment, allowed himself to employ terms which would have been more appropriate closer to home. The Soviet Union representative has been coming here for a long time now and I think we are always glad to see him, and sometimes even to hear him, but it seems to me that he in turn has not taken the opportunity to learn that in the

democratic countries the popularly-elected governments reflect the wishes and sentiments of the people who elect them; they do not represent an elite corps of rulers dictating to an imposing upon a majority given no opportunity to express their free will.

To get back to the problem of Korea. We face, in so far as my delegation is concerned, no question as to our own course. We have made constructive proposals and we await a proper reaction to them from the Communist side. The stand of the United Nations on the Korean matter is known to all. It was formally enunciated at the last session and in the opinion of my delegation it requires no further resolution to reaffirm it now.

What is the situation? After very careful consideration this Committee approved by a huge majority a proposal; it was not the United States proposal, as one would think from the remarks of the Foreign Minister for Czechoslovakia, but a proposal put forward and bearing the sponsorship of India, a proposal designed in all honesty to end the war by offering a fair solution to the vital problem of prisoners-of-war, which seemed to be the sole obstacle to the conclusion of an armistice.

That resolution called for the release of all prisoners-of-war to a Repatriation Commission consisting of Switzerland, Sweden, Poland and Czechoslovakia, which would effect their repatriation in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, but would not apply force to them. It clearly involved some concessions on the part of the sponsors of the original 21-Power Resolution. Its sincerity is demonstrated by the fact that this is a compromise resolution arrived at under the guidance and sponsorship of India, a great Asian state whose impartial devotion to the cause of world peace is surely not to be questioned, even by the representative of Czechoslovakia. Our position was not rigid. The Canadian delegation and the co-sponsors of the 21-Power Resolution were glad to accept and act upon the counsel of our Indian friends since we respect both their wisdom and their motives.

I was looking last night at the record of the debate when the representative of India, Mr. Menon, put forward the reasons for the resolution standing in his country's name. Mr. Menon, explaining before this Committee the intent of the resolution which was ultimately adopted by the General Assembly on December 3, pointed out that it acknowledges the principle that the Geneva Conventions provide for the right of repatriation of all prisoners-of-war and place upon each detaining power the obligation to repatriate prisoners of war and lay no obstacle in the way of their repatriation.

This should be emphasized. The principle of general release and repatriation of prisoners-of-war is not denied. Mr. Menon could not see, and neither could I, that the Geneva Conventions obligate any power to use force to move the prisoners-of-war. The spirit of the Conventions makes it clear that no violence should be done to prisoners. Under the resolution, all prisoners-of-war, without exception, would be delivered to the neutral Repatriation Commission.

No prisoner-of-war would be held back as a result of any previous screening, and the Commission would be obliged to see that no prisoner was subjected to any form of coercion. What could be fairer?

Mr. Vyshinsky thinks that under these circumstances very few prisoners would express an unwillingness to return. If so, well and good. We would not object. But we disagree with Mr. Vyshinsky's estimate of the number of prisoners who would be unwilling to return under these circumstances. In any event, why not put it to the test? That question was asked by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd several times during the debates last fall and we never really received a satisfactory reply.

I think I am constrained to say, in view of the statement just made by the Foreign Minister for Czechoslovakia, that the resolution put forward by the General Assembly on December 3 was by no means the dictum of a clique of closely collaborating States. It certainly was not, as the Foreign Minister for Poland said yesterday, an ultimatum put forward by one great Power. To say, however, that it had the approval of fifty-four countries seems to me a lifeless cipher, and I am sure it is a lifeless cipher to the Foreign Minister for Czechoslovakia.

In order to realize the very broad measure of support which accrues to our stand in this matter, it is instructive to look at the list of countries which joined in approval of the General Assembly's proposal, countries from North and South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. The Foreign Minister for Czechoslovakia said, if I understood his words correctly, that the resolution was a formal mechanical one with a mechanical majority. He also said that it was an illegal resolution, in that it was contrary to the conscience of mankind. Because his words may go to many places, let us see whether or not this resolution does not really give the character of the sponsorship it had in full measure. The representative of Czechoslovakia was not here last fall and I would remind him that this resolution was supported by Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Saudi-Arabia, Sweden, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yeman and Yugoslavia. Surely there lies the conscience of mankind.

Every nation around this table but six voted in favour of the Indian resolution; and of the six, one nation abstained. Only the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic voted against this resolution which the Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia said was formal and mechanical, the dictum of a clique of closely-collaborating States. But the recital of the names of the nations that I have given means that a great majority judgment was made on what would be a just method of resolving the

prisoner-of-war impasse and of bringing to an end the fighting in Korea. More than that, it signifies the crystallization of a moral force which no one would do well to oppose. To refer at this time, therefore, to the General Assembly resolution on Korea is not a retrograde or even a static gesture, despite its sardonic rejection by the North Korean and Chinese Communists and their apologists here, since the marshalling of universal moral force cannot be forever successfully opposed either by bitter communications addressed to the United Nations or by rhetorical attempts to confuse and divert attention from the true situation.

That situation is that the minority of the other side must show themselves responsive to the intent of the General Assembly resolution or stand exposed as intransigent for reasons of their own and determined against co-operation with all those countries striving for peace in Korea. It is now certainly up to them. We should not give up our efforts because the resolution has been rejected. If they say they cannot accept its actual terms, let them meet its spirit by offering helpful proposals of their own, rather than fabricating wordy smoke-screens and useless camouflages. Only in this way can they demonstrate that their faith is as good as that of the great majority of nations which have considered this problem, which is of fundamental importance to world peace.

The Soviet representative's speech of March 2, unfortunately, did not give a satisfactory answer to this challenge, although, as I hope to point out later, it did perhaps contain a hint that we should not abandon the idea of hearing something useful from him. The sole concrete proposal to be found in all of his oration on Monday was a repetition of the Soviet Union resolution submitted to this Committee on December 2 last, which was emphatically rejected, of course, when put to the vote. And even that resolution was restated by him in a deceptive way since he described it as a simple straightforward proposal for an immediate cessation of hostilities. It was neither simple nor straightforward, for it complicated the prisoner-of-war issue by tying it to political matters such as the unification of Korea.

By the Soviet Union proposal, the fate of the prisoners-of-war would be settled by a commission which would be established to deal with both the prisoners-of-war and political questions. There could be no true armistice where our prisoners could be used as pawns for political bargaining, as the representative of Australia pointed out the other day. We could not take away our forces while our prisoners were in enemy hands, leaving that enemy which a plausible pretext to retain the prisoners and to renew the fighting if the political negotiations were not to its liking. It was quite properly agreed that the armistice negotiations at Kaesong and Panmunjom should be confined to military matters, and therefore conducted by military representatives. The disposition of prisoners-of-war was an item of the armistice agenda. It is significant that the Soviet Union authorities themselves, when the armistice discussions were first initiated, actually adopted the attitude that only

military subjects should be discussed in the negotiations. The Soviet Union only decided that the prisoner-of-war item of the armistice agenda should be mixed up with a political conference after it became apparent that the North Korean and Chinese negotiators would not be able to gain the principle of forcible return of those prisoners not wishing to exercise their right to repatriation.

In the last speech, we have heard four references to a cease-fire. A cease-fire is a serious matter. It is not a fit subject for a glib trick of the tongue, such as Mr. Vyshinsky's advice when he said the other day that "whoever wants peace, it is easy, let him put up his hand". I did not see my neighbour to the left following this exhortation, nor did I see the representatives of Poland or Czechoslovakia immediately and obediently raise their hands. Even they could not be hypnotized into such an action, and the Soviet Union representative is always trying out his hypnotic skill. He reminds one of the magician in the old Asian fable who owned a lot of sheep but was too parsimonious to employ shepherds or pen his sheep in. Instead, he would hypnotize the sheep and suggest to them that in fact he knew what was best for them and they should merely seek to trust him. They should not run away because it would actually be quite pleasant to have their throats cut and their skins removed. The magician had no trouble at all with his sheep, which quite eagerly awaited the opportunity to provide him with meat and wool.

"Stop the fighting and leave the details to a political commission", cries the representative of the Soviet Union. The prisoners-of-war, of course, are just a detail. They do not matter. They can wait as hostages while the Communists' side, fortuitously relieved of military pressure, bargains for the concessions it wants, secure in the knowledge that the commission can take no decision without its consent. And if we are not beguiled by this deception, we are rejecting a cease-fire. So you would think, at least, if you should be hypnotized by the magician.

Of course, it was advantageous for the Soviet Union representative to advocate a simple cessation of fighting earlier in the war when so much of the territory of the Korean Republic was in Communist hands. The Communists have not, however, at all times been advocates of a simple immediate cease-fire, as Mr. Vyshinsky in reality is not now. I made reference last November to the proposals put forward in January 1951 by the cease-fire group of the General Assembly. What the cease-fire group called for in effect was the immediate cessation of hostilities with other matters to be discussed subsequently.

As a reply, the Chinese Foreign Minister sent a communication to the First Committee of the General Assembly on January 17 stating that political conditions -- such as the withdrawal of United States forces from Formosa and the seating of Peking representatives in the United Nations -- must be precedent to any settlement in Korea. Mr. Chou En-lai observed that the principle of cease-fire first and negotiations afterwards "could lead to genuine peace" and that the Central People's

Government of China could not agree to this principle. So that there is not a long past history of consistent Communist insistence on immediate and unconditional cease-fire. Why did not the Soviet Union representative support these proposals of the cease-fire committee and raise his hand so that we could have had peace at that time?

Mr. Vyshinsky's call for an immediate cease-fire in Korea, which is of course echoed as a propaganda theme by the followers of Soviet Communism, is a crude attempt to exploit the desire for peace in Korea without providing a practical and adequate means of achieving it.

A cease-fire which does not resolve the prisoner-of-war issue would be an empty gesture. Mr. Vyshinsky would like to pretend that the General Assembly resolution of December 3, 1952 does not provide for an immediate cease-fire. But let us see what the facts are. The General Assembly resolution refers in specific terms to an immediate cease-fire. Acceptance of the resolution would not only provide a basis for solution of the prisoner-of-war issue; it would bring about a cease-fire within twelve hours of the signature of the draft armistice agreement which has so laboriously been worked out. Article 12 of the draft armistice agreement provides as follows:

"The Commanders of the opposing sides shall order and enforce a complete cessation of all hostilities in Korea by all armed forces under their control, including all units and personnel of the ground, naval, and air forces, effective twelve (12) hours after this Armistice Agreement is signed."

Further, the draft armistice agreement contains detailed provisions essential to achieve an effective and durable cease-fire, for its implementation and control. A cease-fire in the context of the draft armistice agreement would not be a mere declaration of intention, such as Mr. Vyshinsky's raising of hands, but a firm and secure cease-fire with adequate safeguards for its maintenance.

While I am dealing with the subject of prisoners-of-war in Korea, I should like to ask the Soviet Union representative whether he has any explanation for the unwillingness of the North Korean and Chinese Communists to exchange immediately sick and wounded prisoners-of-war in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. I have had occasion before in this Committee to refer to the Communist Command's refusal to adhere to the Geneva Conventions -- notably, to the provisions regarding the proper disposition of prisoner-of-war camps, the granting to prisoners of facilities for communication with their families, and receipt by prisoners of relief parcels. The United Nations Command from the outset made known that it was prepared to abide by the Geneva Conventions with regard to prisoners-of-war.

But a specific example of the humanitarianism of the United Nations Command, as compared to the callousness of their opponents, is afforded by an examination of the efforts of the former to arrange for the immediate repatriation of sick and wounded prisoners. This is called for under Article 109 of the Geneva Convention and was indeed urged upon all parties to the conflict last December by the League of Red Cross Societies. Meeting in Geneva on December 13, 1952, the Executive Committee of this international body voted a resolution with these substantive paragraphs:

"Appeals once again to the countries concerned not to rest content until ways and means are found which would bring about a cessation of these hostilities:

"Asks the belligerents as a gesture of good will to take immediate action in implementing the Geneva Conventions by repatriating the sick and wounded prisoners of war in accordance with the appropriate articles of the Geneva Conventions;

"Reaffirms that the services of the League are as always at the disposal of the world in the field of service to mankind which is so specifically theirs".

But, before the passage of this resolution by the League in December of last year, the United Nations Command had tried in vain to effect an exchange of sick and wounded prisoners. As early as December 1951, the United Nations armistice negotiators at Panmunjom, we are informed, made specific proposals for such an exchange to the North Korean and Chinese representatives, but their efforts met with no success. They persisted, nevertheless, in repeating the offer several times during January and March 1952. This humanitarian gesture was dismissed by the North Koreans and Chinese as a delaying device.

The United Nations Commander, General Clark, reiterated the Unified Command's position in this matter on February 21 last by means of a formal communication addressed to the North Korean and Chinese commanders. After referring to the plea of the League of Red Cross Societies, he asked to be informed whether the opposing commanders were prepared to proceed immediately with the repatriation of seriously sick and wounded captured personnel, and expressed readiness to make the necessary arrangements, through his liaison officers at Panmunjom, for a mutual exchange. I am not aware that he has received any reply. It is difficult to imagine why such an offer should not be accepted by anyone truly concerned with the welfare of prisoners-of-war. I should hope that the Communist Command will see fit to give a satisfactory reply either to General Clark or to his liaison officers in Panmunjom.

I wish to revert briefly to the outbreak of the Korean war, since we have had to listen again this morning, yesterday and the day before, to denials of the North Korean aggression. We are satisfied beyond any doubt that the North Korean forces committed aggression upon the Republic of Korea. The United

Nations has officially pronounced this to be the fact and it was, of course, the reason why the United Nations took prompt action to go to the defence of the Republic. Mr. Vyshinsky may say as often as he wants that what happened did not in fact happen; no one can stop him from making that assertion. But the attack of the North Korean regime upon the Republic of Korea is established both by the patent facts and by the reports of the United Nations Commission for Korea. To allege that the Korean Commission gave no judgment on the aggression is simply not true. What could be more condemnatory in this regard than the following sentence taken from the Commission's background telegram of June 21, 1950:

"For the past two years the North Korean regime has, by violently abusive propaganda, by threatening gestures along the 38th Parallel and by encouraging and supporting subversive activities in the territory of the Republic of Korea, pursued tactics designed to weaken and destroy the Government of the Republic of Korea established under the auspices of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea and recognized by the General Assembly."

And then, to make quite clear the record of who committed aggression against whom, the Commission stated specifically - and this I emphasize - in its telegram sent to the United Nations on June 25, 1950, the day of the outbreak of the fighting, that "attack completely unexpected to both Korean Army and Korean Military Advisory Group". Why do Mr. Vyshinsky and the representative of Czechoslovakia who spoke a few moments ago choose to flout the unequivocal opinion of that international body? More attention should be paid to it than to the random expression of individual opinions.

As for the facts, they speak for themselves. South Korea, despite the fact that it has a considerably larger population than North Korea, was rapidly overrun and laid waste, largely because the Republic's armies lacked equipment and training. It is ridiculous to maintain that the South Koreans planned to attack with such pitifully inadequate equipment and training, particularly since the North Koreans were known to be highly trained and heavily equipped. Much of the latter's equipment came from Soviet Union stocks, as Mr. Vyshinsky himself admitted the other day. The United Nations Korean Commission's report of June 25, 1950 also stated that the "South Korean air force only consists of six training planes". What a force to have assembled for such a planned attack!

In view of the fact that we are really, in conformity with our principles, seeking a solution to this problem, we are inclined to hope that we detected in some statements which Mr. Vyshinsky made on Monday a possible gleam of light. What interested me was the Soviet Union representative's remark to the effect that we were just approaching the possibilities for elaborating proposals on the Korean question in the spirit of peace and justice. What did he mean by that? Mr. Vyshinsky also said that we should give the various political views and tendencies an opportunity to reach a common ground. Certainly, the statements

of the Foreign Ministers of Poland and Czechoslovakia have given us little opportunity to reach a common ground. I sincerely hope, however, that Mr. Vyshinsky meant that he had it in his mind to make the kind of constructive proposals for which I appealed at the beginning of my remarks this morning.

It must not be forgotten that the North Korean and Chinese Communists -- and those who speak for them here -- could have brought about a cease-fire had they been willing to accept the compromise offer of the United Nations. And that would have paved the way for the political conference which they desire on Korea and other Far Eastern questions, easing the dangerous tensions and strains which exist in that region. If, however, they are not willing to accept the specific offers of the United Nations, let them in turn, within the principle of these offers as contained in the Indian resolution, make forward-looking proposals which we may consider, and let them do so at once.

Was it to something of this nature that Mr. Vyshinsky was alluding? It is notable that the Soviet Union representative avoided, during his discussion of the matter, any reference to the problem which loomed so large at the first part of this session; that is, the question of the repatriation of prisoners-of-war. This time, there was no insistence on the business of our contention that there should be no forcible repatriation. Most of Mr. Vyshinsky's remarks were confined to his own resolution and to a recital of current United States foreign policy; the subject matter which engaged so much of his attention last autumn in answer to Mr. Acheson was almost completely avoided in the statement made the other day. Does that signify that there have been some other thoughts on this problem and that we may look for a co-operative response of our offers? Again let me say I earnestly hope so, for the matter of the cessation of fighting is of the utmost importance; the lives of human beings depend on it.

We must be patient and painstaking and explore every possibility. That is what we are doing now. I must, however, repeat and issue a warning that we stand by the principles of the General Assembly resolution. There can be no question at all of our abandoning those principles. We do not want to hear from Mr. Vyshinsky and others who may speak later merely old proposals dressed in new clothes. If, however, they have anything new to propose which is not contrary to the principles of our resolution, I hope such a proposal will be forthcoming at once.

It would be most unfortunate if no new lead were forthcoming. For it appears to us that the United Nations would then be faced with distressing alternative situations: either the war would be continued in its present state, or the tempo of the war would be increased. In both cases there would lurk the ever-present peril of the war's extension. And there is no need for either alternative. It is the strong determination of my Government and other United Nations governments that the Korean war should

not spread. It is, equally, the belief and hope of these governments that the war can now be stopped. The military objective of the United Nations in Korea has been substantially achieved. The stage is set for peace, as a result of the draft armistice agreement and the Indian Resolution.

I repeat: we are resolute and determined to maintain our principles. We await in this debate either acceptance of the United Nations offers or other proposals consistent with our principles and put forward in a spirit of understanding and responsibility and a genuine desire for peace.

s/c