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THE INTERNATIONAL CONTROL OF ATOMIC ENERGY

An address by General A.G.L. McNaughton, Canadian Permanent Delegate to the United Nations, to the United Nations Association of Ottawa, May 10, 1948.

I value very much the opportunity which you have given me to speak to you tonight on the subject of the international control of atomic energy. This is a subject which I think has become of transcendent importance in international affairs. In fact I would venture the opinion that the development of a satisfactory solution to this acute problem and the institution of appropriate safeguards are among the indispensable conditions for the establishment and maintenance of stable peace throughout the world.

You will no doubt have noted the statements made at the meeting of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission on Friday last and I am sure that you will all share the disappointment which the majority of the members of the Commission now experience in having to report that the affairs of the Commission have reached an "impasse" which they consider to be beyond the capacity of the Commission itself to resolve. The majority members of the Commission feel that the issues which have been raised now require debate in a wider forum and to this end they have recommended that the situation should be frankly and fully reported first to the Security Council and then to the General Assembly of the United Nations at its forthcoming regular session which is the session called for September next in Paris.

I would like to make it quite clear that this proposal on the part of the majority of the Commission does not represent any acceptance of defeat or confession of failure in their efforts to achieve a proper system for the international control of atomic energy. Quite the contrary - the majority of the members of the Commission are certain that they have evolved and set forth in their reports the technical framework of a system of control which will be satisfactory and which in the end will be accepted and implemented by all nations. They have realized that having completed part of their task which primarily concerns scientific and technological matters the time has arrived when increased efforts should be given to political considerations and therefore they feel that the debate can be pressed with greater advantage in the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I would like you to think of this action by the majority members for what it is - a bold challenge to the forces of reaction, of ignorance, and of timidity to face up to the new conceptions of international organization which are an unescapable consequence of our entry into the atomic age.

This challenge will develop in the General Assembly from the firm basis of the knowledge which has been gathered in the Commission, from the arguments which have been marshalled there and will proceed from the firm conviction which has come to fourteen nations out of the seventeen which have taken part in the work of the Commission to date.

I do not minimize the resistance which still has to be overcome but I do maintain that to date very remarkable progress has been achieved and that we go forward in good heart to complete a task which is in the interest of all peoples and to the real advantage of all nations.

I turn back now to the earlier history of these matters to recount to you something of what has taken place.

The whole business of the development and use of atomic energy is of special interest to the members of this audience, for Canada was very closely associated with the United Kingdom and the United States in the project which resulted in the first use of atomic energy in war - a use which I would observe was decisive in bringing to a quick end Japanese resistance in their home islands and the consequent surrender of all their forces throughout the theatre of operations. Thus the first use of atomic energy in war will always be associated in our minds with a proper ending to the world wide ordeal to which we were subjected in World War II - a struggle in which our conceptions of right and justice and the principles of our way of life had been placed in peril by the evil which the Axis autocracies had sought to impose on the world.

In the last phase of World War II our 6th Canadian Division, which following victory in Europe was being organized in Canada, was destined for the assault landings in Japan and would have taken part in the heavy battles which would have followed. The success of the atomic bombs thus saved Canada from very many casualties and thus their first use to end a tyranny and to restore peace is for us a good augury into the future; we may well look forward to the application of atomic energy to the peaceful progress of the world and to the contribution which this may make to the happiness and welfare of men of good will everywhere.

The evidence shows clearly that the possibilities for the beneficial peaceful uses of atomic energy are literally incalculable. In medicine - in chemistry - in biology - tools of such novelty and power and aptness to the task in hand, that wherever they have been freed for use, the frontiers of knowledge are being pressed back and the vistas of human understanding widened in a most remarkable fashion.

In Canada the inspiring task of leading and stimulating these developments and helping the research workers at our universities in their endeavours has been given to the National Research Council. The Council has been made the operating authority for the Atomic Energy Control Board with jurisdiction over the plants which have been erected at Chalk River. The work in hand there will therefore be made to contribute directly in the search for new knowledge.

We would be very happy indeed to give the freest information about this hopeful work but unfortunately as matters stand it is not in all fields that there is freedom of use or to give information. Nor can this be so at present, for the materials which release atomic energy have a dual character. They are useful in the peaceful arts but they are also most highly dangerous and in the hands of unscrupulous persons, even in comparatively minute quantities, their possession may be a terrible menace to our security.

It is for this reason that in all matters related to atomic energy the requirements of national defence must take precedence and there can be no compromise of security until the position has been made safe by means of an international agreement for the control of atomic energy which will give acceptable safeguards enforceable with certainty.

The limiting factor on the peaceful development of atomic energy, particularly in its application to power and other large uses, is the absence of this international agreement for its control and

regulation and so the best service which can now be rendered is to do everything possible to develop this agreement under which we may hope that all nations may come to have confidence that atomic energy will be used for peaceful purposes only. As part of this agreement it is proposed to set up a system of safeguards and controls which will in fact ensure that atomic war cannot be prepared or at the least that if any nation should attempt to do so then the situation will be promptly known and reported to all other nations so that they will be able to take timely action as required by the circumstances.

It has been thought by those who have studied all aspects of this problem that without undue restriction on the peaceful use of atomic energy and without the setting up of an unduly cumbersome organization, it would be possible to provide at the least several months' warning before atomic war could be launched by any nation on any significant scale. It is thought that the certainty of having such a period of warning during which appropriate counter measures could be taken should give the nations confidence to undertake the establishment of such a system, which, once established, could be expected to develop in reliability.

If confidence can once be established that atomic war is not being prepared, it may reasonably be expected to extend to all other weapons of mass destruction and ultimately to war itself. It seems therefore that the key to the situation in this troubled world is agreement for the control of atomic energy.

In the absence of an international agreement an alternative possibility of preserving peace, which is, I think, fully justified in the short term view by considerations of expediency and practicability, as well as of necessity, is that the present paramount ascendancy in this field, which is now held by peace loving and democratic nations, and in largest measure by the United States, should be continued and increased by every method which is open. The very progress which is made by these nations will be a strong inducement to other nations to join in the project for international control so that they may share in the benefits.

There can, of course, be no continuing monopoly in the facts of science; what one nation has found out, others can learn also by the application of appropriate efforts and granted sufficient time. In truth there never have been any real scientific secrets about the atomic bomb. The whole epic history of nuclear physics has been international in character from the first detection in France of the peculiar rays given off by uranium minerals, and in between these great events there have been very substantial contributions to knowledge from almost every country engaged in scientific research.

While I make the point that there are no real scientific secrets yet there are most important technological advantages and engineering know-how which are the exclusive prerequisite of those who have laboured and carried the burden of development. I would say that in the atomic energy project, like any other major undertaking, there is a phase where prodigious effort is required for little in the way of return; then there comes a point at which the returns increase very rapidly for a little additional effort and everything goes forward on a rising curve.

The United States is today on this rising curve with atomic energy. Its leadership is now in an unquestioned position and if those concerned maintain their research and development on the scale authorized by their Congress it seems that their ascendancy will remain for a decade or so at least. Meanwhile no other country on earth has as yet passed out of the difficult first phase to which I have referred and it will be a very arduous and long process to overtake the United States lead which is presented by capital equipment in atomic plants and research establishments estimated to have cost some billions of dollars mostly in payment in one way or another for skills which had to be taken

out of the national economy. No other country is as yet endowed with these skills on such a lavish basis nor is it likely that any other country could make this diversion without destroying or at the least seriously crippling their national economy.

In the light of what I have said as to the great magnitude and long continued efforts required for the preparation of atomic war, it seems reasonably probable that we need not fear its outbreak on any significant scale for a while yet. There is thus no occasion for hysteria but on the other hand it would be folly to waste the time which remains to us through a failure to give proper consideration to the defensive measures which are open and in particular to advance by every means within our power the setting up of an international agreement which will effectively protect the peoples of the world.

The first step towards the creation of such an international agreement was made very shortly after the termination of the war by the United States, Great Britain and Canada, in a declaration issued at Washington on 15 November 1945, recognizing the need for an international agreement and proposing as a matter of great urgency the setting up of a Commission under the United Nations to study the problem and to make recommendations for its control.

This was followed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Moscow in December 1945, at which the Washington proposals were endorsed. At the meeting of the General Assembly on 24 January 1946 in London, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was established by unanimous resolution.

The Commission, composed of delegates from each country represented on the Security Council, as well as Canada, when Canada is not a member of the Security Council, was charged with making specific proposals, among other matters "for the control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes", and "for effective safeguards by way of inspection and other means to protect complying states against the hazards of violations and evasions."

When the Commission first met in New York in June 1946, it was represented with two different plans for the control of atomic energy - one proposed by the United States, and the other by the Soviet Union. The United States proposals called for the formation of an International Atomic Development authority, which would foster beneficial uses of atomic energy and would control atomic activities in all nations either by direct ownership, management or supervision, in the case of activities potentially dangerous to world security, or by a licensing and inspection system in the case of other activities. This system of control would be set up by stages and after it was in operation, the manufacture of atomic bombs would cease. Existing bombs would be disposed of, and the world authority would be given information regarding the production of atomic energy. In addition, the United States proposal emphasized that the veto of the Great Powers in the Security Council should not apply in the event that any nation was charged with having violated the international agreement not to develop or use atomic energy for destructive purposes.

I may say that the proposals made by the United States accord very closely with the views of the Government of Canada, and of many other nations in the Western World, as to how atomic energy might be brought under control. On the other hand, the Soviet Government put forward a plan which differed fundamentally. It proposed the immediate outlawing of the atomic bomb and the destruction of all existing stocks of atomic weapons within a three month period. To this end the Soviet delegate tabled a draft convention which, he said, should be negotiated forthwith as the first step towards the establishment of a system of international control.

The Soviet delegate was prepared to discuss methods of control and inspection but he maintained that the immediate prohibition of atom bombs must come first. In recent discussions of the Soviet proposals, he has again made this point very clear; he holds that his prohibition convention must be signed, ratified and put into force before the Soviet will agree to even discuss a system of control.

The idea that the menace to world peace presented by the atomic bomb could be solved simply by the signing of an international agreement to prohibit its use or manufacture seems very unreal. The experiences of the last twenty-five years have shown that international agreements alone are not enough to safeguard the peace. The prohibition of the use and manufacture of the atomic bomb at the present time would merely seriously reduce the military strength of the United States, the only nation now in possession of atomic bombs, at least on any scale which would suffice to make atomic war. It would be an act of unilateral disarmament which would give no assurance that any country engaged in atomic energy activities would not, or could not, make and use the bomb in the future. Fissionable material, the essential substance for such peaceful applications of atomic energy as the development of industrial power, is also the explosive element of the bomb, and in the absence of effective inspection and control could readily be diverted clandestinely from peaceful to military uses by a nation secretly preparing for atomic war.

For these reasons, most members of the Commission are in general agreement with the principles of the United States proposals. They consider that the prohibition of the use or manufacture of the atomic bomb should form part of an over-all control plan, so that when such prohibitions are put into effect they would be accompanied by the applications of safeguards such as international inspection of all countries to ensure that no secret activities in atomic energy were in progress.

After weeks of discussion along these general political lines, the Commission decided to seek a new approach to the problem by a systematic study, in committee, of the available scientific information, to determine whether an effective control of atomic energy was in fact feasible technically. This study resulted in a unanimous report by the scientists of all nations represented on the Commission that "they did not find any basis in the available scientific facts for supposing that effective control is not technologically feasible". With this conclusion before it, the Commission then proceeded to discuss the "safeguards" that would be required at each stage in the production and application of atomic energy to ensure its use for peaceful purposes only.

The Commission's findings were set out in detail in its First Report which was approved on 22 December 1946, by a vote of 10 to 0, with the Soviet and Polish Delegations abstaining. In this Report, the Commission pointed out that as all applications of atomic energy depended on Uranium and Thorium, control of these materials was the essential basic safeguard.

The Commission, therefore, recommended international inspection of all mines, mills and refineries to prevent possible diversion of materials to the making of atomic bombs. As the materials assumed a more concentrated form and were therefore more directly applicable to bomb making, the Commission believed that the controls would have to be even stricter. They considered that at least certain plants producing substantial quantities of fissionable material should be placed under the exclusive operation and management of the international authority.

The Second Report of the Atomic Energy Commission was approved by the Commission on 11 September and sent forward to the Security Council. Ten nations voted in favour, the U.S.S.R. voted against and Poland abstained.

The Report contains specific proposals as to the powers and functions which an international agency would need to have. Particular consideration has been given to a system of checks and balances to be applied to the operations of the proposed Agency through the Security Council, the General Assembly or the International Court of Justice as appropriate. These limitations have been worked out so as not to impede prompt action by the Agency wherever this may be required but at the same time to make the Agency "responsible" in the sense that we use this term in reference to our Cabinet system of Government in Canada, that is to check any arbitrary and unnecessary use of authority and to provide for methods whereby any complaints against the Agency or its staff can be fully investigated and corrected. I think I can claim that the proposals in this Second Report are fully in accord with this democratic concept and yet that they do not compromise the powers needed to be exercised by the Agency in any way.

On behalf of Canada I had the authority to state that in our view these proposals, together with the General Findings and Recommendations of the First Report, provide the essential basis for the establishment of an effective system of control to ensure the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes only and to protect complying states against the hazards of violations and evasions.

As I have said this view is shared by nine out of the eleven nations now members of the Commission; it is shared also by five of the six other nations who have served as members. On the other hand, the delegate of the U.S.S.R. supported now by the Ukraine and previously by Poland, expressed his continued opposition. He reiterated his view that no progress had been made because the report did not provide a solution for what he described as the urgent problem of prohibiting atomic weapons and particularly for the early destruction of the United States stocks of atomic bombs. He objected also to the ownership of fissionable material, and of plants for its processing and use, being vested in an international authority which he held to be both unnecessary and contrary to the principles of national sovereignty. He took similar objection to the proposals for the licensing of non-dangerous atomic energy activities, which the majority of the Commission felt should be supervised by the Agency, although their operation had been entrusted to a national authority.

The Soviet delegate thought that some system of "quotas" would suffice and he said that this proposal had not been sufficiently explored. The only point on which the Soviet seemed to have moved forward from the position which had been taken at the time of the First Report was in relation to "Inspection and Control" which the Soviet now conceded must be international in scope and organization with personnel who are international. However, it is clear that by international control and inspection the U.S.S.R. merely contemplates occasional or periodic inspection rather than the detailed continuous process which the other members believe to be essential for security. The representative of the U.S.S.R. has conceded the need for "special" investigations in case of suspicion but he objects to the setting up of any organization which would have the information necessary to detect diversions or clandestine operations. In consequence the basis of security proposed by the Soviet seems very unreal to the other members of the Commission.

Since the beginning of the year the discussions have continued and some progress has been made in clarifying ideas in respect to the form and scope of the International Control Organization which would be required if the majority proposals developed in the Commission were to be put into effect. However, it is now evident that the form of the International Organization required is intimately dependent on the details of the methods of control and safeguards to be adopted and, as these are not agreed by the U.S.S.R. and the Ukraine, it does not seem useful to pursue the matter further until there is some indication that

the minority will accept the majority view. When this transpires it will be relatively easy to settle the particulars of the International Organization required. A conclusion in this sense was recorded in Committee 2 on Tuesday, 30 March 1948.

Fully half the time and attention of the members of the Commission during this year have been devoted to a meticulous re-examination of the Soviet proposals in detail to make abundantly certain that no possible misconception of their purport should stand in the way of agreement. However, it is evident that there is no misconception and there thus remains a very wide gap between the views of the U.S.S.R. now echoed by the Ukraine and those of the rest of the Commission.

On Monday, 5 April 1948, Committee 1 took note of this position and accepted a report prepared by the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, China and Canada, in which the Soviet proposals are fully analysed and the reasons for their inadequacy stated in detail. Thus the two principal Committees of the Atomic Energy Commission have reached the conclusion that no useful purpose will be served by continuing their discussions at present.

The conclusions of Committees 1 and 2 as to the inadequacy of the Soviet proposals and the views of the majority on the situation have now been included in a Draft of the Commission's 3rd Report which, as I have said, was presented to the Atomic Energy Commission on Friday, 7 May 1948, given first reading and referred to Governments for preliminary opinion and instruction to their delegations. It is expected that the consideration of this Report will continue in the week commencing 16 May and that thereafter as I indicated it will go to the Security Council and thence to the General Assembly in September.

As I have remarked we may be disappointed at this suspension of our work in the Commission but I certainly think that we should not be unduly cast down on this account, and we should certainly not underestimate the value and significance of the progress which has been made.

When the Commission began its sessions in June of 1946, now nearly two years ago, there was little to go on beyond a conviction that the dread potentialities of atomic war needed to be brought under effective international control. Since then the problem has been examined in its many intricacies and multitude of aspects. Gradually through the more than 240 regular meetings which have been held and the many informal discussions which have taken place a consensus of opinion has formed and found expression until today nine nations out of the eleven members of the Commission believe that they have found the right path forward. The circumstances that the U.S.S.R. does not yet agree should not be regarded too seriously at this stage. As a matter of fact the delegate of the U.S.S.R. has made substantial contributions to the discussion and at the least the U.S.S.R. has formed an anvil on which the rest of us have had an opportunity to forge and hammer out the conclusions we have now reached.

Up to date we have been more anxious that the U.S.S.R. should continue to be represented in the discussions and less concerned that they would at once agree to the majority proposals. We first of all had to find out for ourselves what it was to which we wished them to agree. I think I can claim that we have felt so convinced of the necessity for proper control and we are now so genuine in our belief as to how it must be brought about that we feel that something of this sincerity must find its way through to the people of Russia. It is a fact that no people would benefit more than they would from what we have proposed and so both on the grounds of benefit from the peaceful application as well as of security it is not too much to hope that eventually a way will be found to traverse the opposition of those who presently control the policy of the Soviet.

It is true that at present it is impossible to obtain agreement on the methods for control; the recent discussions on the Soviet proposals have shown that they are unprepared to yield on certain points which the other nations hold as essential constituents in any satisfactory plan. But it seems that the Soviet objections arise from the fact that, in the tension and mistrust of the world situation as it exists today, they evidently do not feel that they can give up, to an international body in which nations they consider unfriendly to them are bound to be in the majority, the degree of authority which the other nations are convinced is essential for security.

There are some grounds for hope, therefore, that in the future, when nations of the world may be less sharply divided and when the United Nations does in fact represent a body unified for the purposes of peace, it will be possible to convince the U.S.S.R. that the plan for the control of atomic energy put forward in the reports of the Atomic Energy Commission does in truth represent a proper basis for the elimination of atomic warfare and that it is not a plan to maintain the domination of certain nations. At that time we may hope that the Soviet will be prepared to discuss these proposals with a more open mind and that, with perhaps a few modifications, they will then accept their implications.

In addition to recording the remarkable unanimity of view of all those who have been permitted to approach this problem with open minds, I hope this report will be recognized for what it is - not the end of the intensive efforts which have been put forth but rather as a summation of results achieved to date and as a basis for continued efforts to be made in the Assembly and to be renewed in the Commission as soon as possible because it is imperative that atomic energy should be brought under effective international control in the interest of the security of all nations and all peoples.

It is in this spirit that our Third Report concludes and we have been very careful to provide that the Commission while "suspended" is nevertheless not to be disbanded. Moreover, a double method of recalling it together has been provided so that there may be no doubt that it will resume its work so soon as attendant circumstances become propitious.

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