

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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Statement by Mr. L.B. Pearson,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations,
In the Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly,
September 26, 1949.

Every speaker in the general discussion which opens our Assembly emphasizes - and rightly so - the vital role of the United Nations in sustaining and ensuring peace. Is it doing that? Is it being given a chance to do it? The answer is indicated by the fact that five years after the end of war even the formal processes of peace-making have not yet been completed. Even if they had, there would be no assurance in the international atmosphere today, a compound of suspicion and fear, that the United Nations could convert a technical peace settlement into something that would be more than the absence of armed conflict. The major problems of the post-war period remain unsettled and the conditions that would make possible their solution do not seem to exist. It is with increasing concern, therefore, that the people of the world regard these unsolved problems and watch the United Nations Assembly in its efforts to make a contribution to their solution.

We must begin by making a careful re-appraisal of the policies and activities and procedures of our world organization, and asking the question what, in the circumstances, we may reasonably expect the United Nations to accomplish.

So far as the Canadian Government is concerned, we have tried to make practicability the touchstone of our attitude towards the United Nations. Where we consider there is any real promise that a proposed course of action will contribute effectively to the solution of any particular problem, we are prepared to give it our full support. On the other hand, we wish to avoid giving to the United Nations, tasks which in the light of the limitations under which it now suffers, and which must some day be removed, it is clearly unable to perform. We wish to be certain that before any course of action is initiated there is a reasonable expectation that it can be carried through to a good conclusion, and that the members of the United Nations will support the organization in this process.

These are the principles which have guided the Canadian Government in determining more particularly the policy it should follow in the Security Council, where its first term of membership is now coming to an end.

When we accepted membership on the Security Council we were fully conscious of the great possibilities for good which it, of course, possessed. We knew also, however, that these possibilities would be largely nullified if the five permanent members were not able to work together on a basis of friendly co-operation and mutual concessions. Without such a basis, the veto would obviously be used to prevent political decisions being reached in the Council, and the military staff committee would not be able to reach any agreement to put international force behind any decision - even if one were reached.

In spite of these handicaps, however, the majority of the members of the Security Council have tried to make it work constructively and there have been some real successes.

As a consequence the Council, although unfortunately still lacking the powers necessary to fulfil its primary function of maintaining peace and security, has worked out flexible and adaptable procedures which have often been effective and, at least, constitute a useful method of doing international business.

In the international political situation that exists it is surprising, not that the Security Council has done so little, but that it has done so much. In particular, very valuable experience has been gained, and some good results achieved, in the handling of three troublesome and dangerous questions which have been brought before the Council - Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir. The Security Council has not solved any one of these problems, and it is clear that their ultimate solution must be worked out by the people who are directly responsible for the circumstance and whose daily lives are actually affected. The Council has, nevertheless, played an important role in preventing the outbreak of general war in all three areas. That must be admitted even by those who are disappointed because the Council has not been able to take final and definite action in regard to any one of them.

Our delegation hopes that, in carrying out its further responsibilities, the Council will be guided by certain principles of action which have emerged in the course of the past two or three years. These principles in default of an improvement in relations between the communist and democratic worlds, would seem to mark the limits that we can now reach. To attempt to go beyond these limits in present circumstances is merely inviting failure. The first is that the Security Council shall not initiate action that it cannot complete with its present resources. There have often been demands that the Security Council should intervene in some area or another with force, and that when fighting occurs, the Security Council should take steps to suppress it. There would be a great deal to recommend such intervention if it could be carried out firmly and quickly, but the fact is, of course, that the Security Council has at present no effective way of imposing its will. In consequence in many cases it can do little more in the first instance than call upon the parties engaged in the dispute to stop fighting and start talking, offering them the means by which they can work out a settlement by negotiation rather than by conflict. This is not a dramatic or spectacular method of procedure, but in the circumstances it has served fairly well.

The second principle which, in our opinion, should guide the actions of the Security Council is that to the greatest extent possible the responsibility for solving a political problem should be left with the people who are immediately affected by it. In respect of Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir, for instance, it is still the case that the parties directly concerned and the people who live in the area must seek to determine the measures by which peace will be maintained in these areas. This is not only the most practical principle of action, it revives and strengthens a sense of responsibility at the point where it is most vital to healthy, political life, and it sets the objectives of an agreed, rather than an imposed solution.

The third general principle which seems to us to have emerged is that the Security Council should in all cases immediately concentrate its influence on putting an end to hostilities or disorders whenever they occur. By insisting on this principle, and by insisting equally that fighting shall be stopped without prejudice to the ultimate political solution, the Security Council has been on strong ground. It has not, of course, been able to command complete obedience. Fighting has recurred even in areas where a firm truce seemed to have been established, and it has not been possible to guarantee absolutely that the ultimate outcome of a dispute would not be affected by the military action which had taken place. In general, however, the primary concern of the Security Council, that peace should be kept while negotiations proceed, has been respected and has contributed materially to the progress which has been made in the settlement of disputes. The moral authority of our world organizations - which seems to be all that it is now permitted to have - is no slight thing, and no state, great or small, lightly disregards its decisions.

It is an encouragement to those who believe in the United Nations and hope for its success to observe the practical results which have come from the application of the principles which I have mentioned. It is encouraging also to have found that, when demands were made on the United Nations, people came forward and offered their

services, often in dangerous circumstances, in order to carry out these tasks. There is no greater evidence of the vitality of our organization and of the role which it may play in the world than the loyal service which it has been able to command from its own representatives.

Certainly the task before the United Nations is great, and its responsibilities are likely to be steady and continuing rather than brief and episodic. For example, all three of the major subjects which have preoccupied the Security Council during the past two years are related to one great general and continuing movement. It arises out of the transformation of the colonial relationship between European people and people in other continents into a new partnership of free communities. A great tide is moving in the affairs of men, and it calls for radical and complicated adjustment in political relationships. It is not surprising that, as it takes place, it produces strains and tensions, and that some people are impatient for greater speed. But there is evidence before us every day that the process begun many decades ago is accelerating and that a completely new relationship is being worked out between the peoples of the western world and what were once called dependent areas. The United Nations is playing an important part in this process. This, I think, is one of the reasons why the world should be most grateful for the existence of this organization today.

On Friday last and on many other occasions the leader of the Soviet delegation accused the democracies of imperialism of the old kind is a rapidly diminishing force; a dying doctrine. The real danger today lies in the new imperialism of the post-war period. During that period only one state in the world has extended its borders and the area of its domination. That state has annexed 179,000 square miles of territory, and included within its borders in the last ten years more than twenty-one million people. Backed by its armies, it has imposed satellite regimes on neighboring states. It has used its great material power and resources to rivet its economic control over the peoples under its influence. Its leaders have talked freely of "liberation" and of "national sovereignty", but its agents abroad have never hesitated to proclaim their obedience to its control and their determination to serve its interests above the interests of their own governments and their own peoples. How can there be a feeling of peace and security, where an alien power insists on imposing its domination over other nations and peoples? We do not dispute for a moment the right of any state to maintain its own social and economic order, along with its territorial integrity. But we of the free democracies reject this new imperialism which uses the subversive forces of international communism to destroy the national independence of even communist states which will not accept its interference and its dictates. It is this new imperialism which the world watches with so much concern, partly because of its aggressive interference in the affairs of other states, partly because of its inherent instability. There are already evidences that because of its own internal weaknesses and contradictions it will not survive. As this new imperialism changes, a more just and equitable relationship amongst the states which it affects may come about. I hope that the United Nations will be permitted to play a constructive role in that change, as it is now playing in other areas where the old imperialism of earlier centuries is now disappearing.

The leader of the Soviet delegation also made on Friday a strong plea for support of the United Nations. He thought that certain United Nations bodies in their present form were most unsatisfactory, and felt that we should not put up with this state of affairs. His appeal for support and improvement of these bodies would have been more impressive if the government which he represents had not refused to play any part in the United Nations specializing agencies which have been established since the war. This boycott extends even to those agencies dealing with questions of health and welfare, food and agriculture, civil aviation and cultural relations. A government which follows that negative and sterile policy should not lecture the rest of us on support for the United Nations or on the virtues of international co-operation.

The Soviet delegate also argued on Friday, and in more detail on other occasions, that the international control of weapons of mass destruction, must not involve an invasion of national sovereignty. Such an insistence makes effective control futile and meaningless. It will be small comfort if and when some atomic bomb drops on us to know that while we have lost everything else, we have saved our sovereignty to the very end. If a state puts formal sovereignty ahead of peace

and security, then its support for international control of atomic and other weapons of mass destruction is hypocritical and meaningless.

The leader of the Soviet delegation also made a vigorous attack against war-mongering, something which, of course, all of us detest and which we must combat from whatever source it comes, whether from a bellicose general or a Cominform agitator. But Mr. Vishinsky ignored completely one despicable form of this crime against peace, civil war-mongering, the direct attempt of one government to destroy the authority of the government of some other state by fomenting civil war. He also ignored that kind of war-mongering which, by state decree and direction, poisons the minds of peoples against each other; which even prostitutes the education of children to the ends of aggressive ideological warfare. The kind of war-mongering which distorts and misrepresents history, science and even letters in the interest of national policy and which prevents international understanding and co-operation by putting a blanket of fear and ignorance and isolation over the minds and bodies of its people.

The leader of the Soviet delegation made a plea for peace and said that his country remains faithful to the principles of international co-operation. He can be assured, I feel certain, of our devotion to those ideals. If some are sceptical of their acceptance by others, that scepticism can be easily removed when performance matches promise. He quoted the leader of his own government when he said "we stand for peace", but we have read other statements from that same source, meant not for foreign but for home consumption, which preached the gospel of inevitable and bitter conflict. Which are we to believe?

We know one thing. We of the smaller powers know it with a special feeling of dread, that there is no real peace, but fear and insecurity in the world today. We know that there is a great menace to our free institutions, and to our security in the aggressive and subversive force of international communism which has behind it all the resources of a great power - the most heavily armed power in the world, where every male inhabitant is dedicated and trained to the military or other service of his government from the cradle to the grave. When some states, knowing that there is at the moment no prospect of universal collective defence through the United Nations, attempt to remove or alleviate this fear by banding together in a pact which will make possible at least some collective resistance against aggression, the attempt is branded as aggressive and against the Charter, and so branded by those who have been largely responsible for making the U.N. so ineffective, a development which in its turn has made these limited agreements necessary. The repetition of this charge does not make it true, especially when it is made by those who have already worked out a whole network of Treaties and Alliances in Eastern Europe, only a few of which have been even registered with the United Nations.

If and when the United Nations can organize effective arrangements for defence against aggression on a universal basis, all other alternate and second-best, very much second-best, arrangements must be scrapped. We must work, in spite of all obstacles, to that end. Until we achieve it, however, we do the best we can to put collective force, even on a narrower front, behind our will for peace. Our actions will be the best proof that our intentions are not aggressive. We are willing to accept that test for ourselves. Others will also be judged by it - and not by words.

We can apply this test, for instance, to the three proposals that have been tabled by the Soviet delegation and which we have before us.

The first, by singling out two member states for condemnation as war-mongers, is obviously meant for propoganda and not for peace.

The second appears to call for prohibition of atomic weapons and the establishment of a system of adequate and rigid international control. The majority of this Assembly has already translated those words into express conditions which represent the requirements for effective control and prohibition. If the Soviet resolution accepts those conditions, progress can now be made in the United Nations, which is the only place where progress can be made. If it does not accept these express conditions, then again, I suggest that we must class this proposal as propoganda.

The third resolution calls upon us - and especially the permanent members of the Security Council - to settle our difference peacefully. We have already, all of us, accepted that specific obligation by acceptance of the Charter. Furthermore, the inclusion in this resolution of the words "the mighty popular movement for peace and against war-mongers", which have a peculiar meaning in the communist lexicon, seems to bring this resolution also into the field of propaganda.

If the practice of introducing resolutions for the purpose of propaganda persists, then, Mr. President, even under your distinguished leadership, this Assembly will find it difficult to make that contribution to peace which we so ardently desire to make. We must, however, in spite of all obstacles keep everlastingly at the task. Only by so doing can we maintain in the minds and hearts of all people, faith in the United Nations as the best, possibly the only hope for the prevention of a war, which, if we allowed it to occur, would engulf and destroy us all.

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