

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA



No. 49/35

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE
INTERNATIONAL CONTROL OF ATOMIC ENERGY

An address delivered by General A.G.L. McNaughton, to the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Corps Association, at Barriefield, Ontario, on October 22, 1949.

I count it a very great privilege to be here today to foregather with the Corps of Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. First and foremost, I am very pleased indeed to have this opportunity to express to all of you the deep sense of appreciation which I feel in the very great honour which the Corps has done me in nominating me as Colonel Commandant and may I also express my very great appreciation to my old friend, the Minister of National Defence and to the Government of Canada for sanctioning my appointment to this high office.

I assure you that I will do my best to discharge the duties which will be incumbent upon me and in particular I hope that from now on I may be more fortunate than I have been in the past in being able to be present at the various Corps meetings throughout the year and that thereby I shall be enabled to keep touch with all the members of the Corps. I hope, in particular, that I may see something at firsthand of the work and training which is being done and of the organization which you are evolving to carry out the vitally important duties in Canada's defence which have been allotted to you. Needless to say I have every confidence that these duties will be discharged with that high efficiency and complete satisfaction to all concerned that has been characteristic of Canadian electrical and mechanical engineers since the Corps' establishment during World War II and long before that also.

I have said I hope that I shall be more fortunate in the future to be with the Corps but by that I must be careful not to imply any discontent with the task which has fallen to me to carry out during the last four years. Because indeed, for international importance, both present and into the future, and for dynamic technical and international political interest, I do not think that any other work could have matched the experience which I have been privileged to have as Canada's Representative on the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission and on the Security Council. I feel sure you will have understood the pressing and continued urgency of this work and my consequent inability to leave the United Nations except on somewhat rare and uncertain occasions, seldom predictable in advance.

It is in relation to the United Nations that I am to talk to you tonight. This organization is now only in its 4th

Session but already there is literally an amazing accomplishment to its credit. In every one of the component councils, commissions, committees, and specialized agencies, significant advances have been achieved. Everywhere you look in the United Nations Organization -- in the groups dealing with economic and social questions -- in the groups concerned with the problems of food and trade and transport -- with labour and health -- with refugees -- with communications -- with postal services -- with education and scientific and cultural matters -- in every one of these great categories of endeavour you find men and women from all over the world coming together, stating their problems without fear or favour, consulting one another, bringing their minds into agreement and hammering out solutions by the method of debate -- solutions which are then recommended to the nations of the world, and, in many cases, promptly adopted.

In all these economic and social matters where, for their own reasons, there is little Soviet participation, it is evident that accomplishment is on a rising curve and it seems that with each step forward the habit of agreement becomes somewhat less difficult. All of which sets a very inspiring example and stimulus to those of us who have to labour in the field of the political and security questions which today trouble the nations, principally by reason of the rift between the Soviet and the West for which no bridge has yet been found and which therefore remains an ever-present difficulty and continuing anxiety in every question which comes under consideration.

By reason of our representation at San Francisco and then at all the subsequent meetings of the Assembly, the people of Canada have become aware, at least in a general way of these security problems which afflict the world and always we have shown sympathy with those in distress and often we have given friendly counsel and, on occasion, disinterested advice. But during the last two years we have had to do much more than that because acceptance of membership in the Security Council has entailed not only the close and detailed study of every political and security problem which threatens peace throughout the world but we have undertaken the serious duty to contribute to the solution of these grave questions and to be responsible for any opinion and advice we may have had to offer.

And please do not think that the advice we give is any casual matter or the outcome of views which may be held by any one individual speaking for Canada at Lake Success. Indeed the situation is quite different, for, taking our United Nations duties seriously, as we have always done, and endeavouring to make the fullest use of all the organs of the United Nations in the conduct of our foreign relations, as was the policy of Mr. Mackenzie King when he was Prime Minister and as is now the policy of Mr. St. Laurent in that office, it means that every important question which is debated in the Security Council has to be considered beforehand at all levels of government and that policies and principles to guide our statements and arguments must first be approved by the Cabinet itself. And I imagine Mr. Claxton will bear me out in saying that Security Council matters represent a considerable and continuing portion of the business which goes to the Cabinet for decision.

Unfortunately the list of disputes which have come to the Security Council has been very long. It has ranged around the world from Berlin to Trieste and Greece and to

Palestine, to Kashmir and Indonesia and Korea and other places where angry men have stood in opposition with arms in their hands, -- and where, on occasion, peace has broken down in acts of war, of riot and insurrection, of sabotage and murder, -- where, only with the greatest difficulty and by reason of the persistent and devoted endeavours of the servants of the United Nations on the spot has the conflict been kept in bounds and held from precipitating some general conflagration. Now we have the added problems of Yugoslavia and China. Most unfortunately the world of today is a very disturbed place.

We have heard much in the way of criticism of the Security Council for not preventing the outbreak of these disturbances -- but they do not originate in the United Nations. On the contrary they are the consequence of ancient national rivalries or of group ambitions or old animosities or trends in the affairs of men which have flared up anew. They are the troubles for which the United Nations was set up to find an answer, not the faults of the organization itself. In some circles also it has become a habit -- a very bad and unfortunate and unjustified habit I would say -- to impute the competency of the Security Council.

My answer to this is that the Security Council does not as yet dispose of any armed force for use as police or to repel aggression, and could not therefore in any case compel obedience. On the contrary the Security Council, as matters stand, is restricted to the employment solely of the arts of persuasion, with its only weapon an informed world opinion -- I say that despite all these restrictions which many people might consider insuperable handicaps, nevertheless there is not a single dispute which has come before the Council which has not been checked and in some measure advanced towards solution. And so, I for one -- and I think many others as well -- will hold with reason to the hopeful view that we are -- even if slowly and despite the Soviet -- advancing towards a state where the rule of law will in the end prevail.

It is not my purpose today to talk to you about the many problems which have been before the Security Council since we have held membership. The time available does not permit the marshalling of the details required for their statement and explanation but there is one matter in which Canada has been specially concerned which I would like to bring before you because I believe that in the long-term view all our other security problems are transient in comparison and fade into insignificance before the dangers and the difficulties which it presents. I refer to the problem of the international control of atomic energy which has again flared into public attention with the announcement made by the President of the United States on September 23 that an atomic explosion had taken place in the territories of the U.S.S.R. Anxiety over the control of atomic energy has troubled the nations of the world during the four years which have passed since the first man-made nuclear explosion took place in the desert of New Mexico on July 16, 1945, when the first experimental atomic bomb was detonated with awe-inspiring results in most remarkable accord with the predictions and prior calculation of the physicists and engineers.

Shortly thereafter, as you will recall, two atomic bombs were exploded over Japan and these had very immediate consequences in inducing the surrender of that country. Thus

World War II ended with the atomic bomb established as a weapon which stood in a class by itself. Even the earlier models used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented a concentration of explosive power some 5,000 to 10,000 times greater than anything which could previously be carried in a single aircraft. By reason of continuing large-scale research, principally in the United States, it is only reasonable to expect that this factor has since been increased substantially.

While these new atomic weapons have this vast power, yet they are only fully effective when used in a surprise attack on concentrated targets. It would not be efficient to use atomic bombs against an army deployed in the field or against a naval force in open battle order. They do not therefore replace conventional armaments by land and sea and the usual vehicles and mechanisms of war continue in their relative importance. Atomic bombs are not an absolute weapon in the sense that their employment by themselves could be expected to win a war. They are a formidable power for destruction which is added to other existing measures, not a new weapon which replaces something else.

The circumstances in which the effects of atomic bombs is to be most feared is when unsuspecting people are concentrated in great cities, when harbours are congested with unwarmed shipping and in manufacturing areas before measures can be taken to disperse important large industries. In consequence what we have most to dread is the secret accumulation in hostile hands of stocks of atomic bombs. Because of the vast power of the atomic weapon even a small stock is a very great menace and now that the U.S.S.R. has been able to produce a nuclear explosion, there will be ever-increasing anxiety. By this I do not mean that ability to wage atomic war follows closely on the incident of a first nuclear explosion or that our technical leadership has been overtaken but I do say that the situation is such that we must continue to bend every effort towards reaching agreement for the creation of safeguards and international controls which will give certainty to the universal enforcement of the prohibition of atomic energy for destructive purposes.

Unfortunately it seems that in the current phase of world development that every improvement in rapidity of communication and movement has served not to promote agreement and accord between nations but to accentuate differences and sharpen disputes. Time and space have largely lost their attenuating effects on the conduct of military operations and this is particularly so in regard to the surprise use of weapons of vast and concentrated power such as the atomic bomb. This is all the more reason why we must press forward patiently and persistently in the fuller organization of the United Nations.

Atomic energy is not just another military weapon. It has a dual character. On the one hand there are its potentialities for cataclysmic destruction -- on the other the almost limitless possibilities for beneficent peaceful uses through which the frontiers of knowledge may be pressed back and the vistas of human understanding widened in most remarkable fashion. These visions intrigue the imagination and everyone would be very happy to facilitate this search for new knowledge by contributing the information and the help which they may have available. But, unfortunately, as matters stand, it is not in all fields that there is freedom to give or to use information, nor can this be so because

the same materials which are useful to the peaceful arts are also the identic materials of the bomb and in the hands of unscrupulous persons, even in comparatively small quantities, 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. 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.

The solution of this problem is not a simple matter. The secrets of nature being uncovered by the scientists cannot be wiped from the world's memory by edict or decree. The presence of fissionable material is a fact, for good or for evil, and certainly mankind will not consent to be deprived of the manifest advantages of atomic energy merely because of the destructive possibilities of its misuse.

The first step toward 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, D.C. on November 15, 1945. Recognizing the need for an international agreement, the President of the United States, and the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Canada proposed, 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 declaration was followed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.S.R. in Moscow in December, 1945, at which the Washington proposals were endorsed. These three Governments then invited France, China, and Canada to join with them in sponsoring the proposal at the General Assembly. At the first meeting of the General Assembly on January 24, 1946 in London, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was established by unanimous resolution.

The membership of this Commission comprises the 11 countries members for the time being of the Security Council, that is the 5 permanent members and the 6 non-permanent members each elected for 2 year terms; Canada, as one of the original sponsors continues to be included even when she is not a member of the Security Council. The Commission is 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."

The Atomic Energy Commission first met in New York in June 1946 and during the following two years -- up to June 1948 -- in the course of some 240 meetings, it produced three reports.

In all, seventeen nations have served on the Commission for various periods and of these, fourteen, including Canada, are in agreement as to the general nature of the system of control required. The other three, which are the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet-dominated states of Poland and the Ukraine, hold different views. The plan of the majority provides for the creation of an international atomic agency which would own in trust for the nations of the world all uranium and thorium after

they are taken from the ground. This agency would control the extent of the mining of these ores which are the only known materials from which energy can be released in substantial amounts by the fission of the atom. Production would be strictly related to consumption and there would be no accumulated stocks to cause anxiety.

The agency would own, operate, and manage all facilities handling dangerous amounts of fissionable material. It would conduct research in the field of atomic energy except that research requiring non-dangerous quantities only would be freely licensed with provision for full publication of findings.

The agency would administer the quotas of atomic energy materials, facilities or power allocated to each nation in accordance with the proposed atomic energy treaty and would build and operate plants within the nation's quota. No nation would be permitted to possess dangerous quantities of atomic fuels or to own plants for making them. Atomic weapons would be prohibited and the agency would be empowered to ascertain resources and to prevent secret activities.

It is the view of the majority that only with such a system operating satisfactorily would countries possessing atomic weapons be justified in giving to the world their secrets for the production of atomic energy. These nations feel that the only way by which security can be given to the world lies in the complete elimination of secrecy in atomic matters, together with the institution of international inspection and control on such a comprehensive basis that it will provide adequate and acceptable safeguards against all possibility of the hazards of violations and evasions. Agency operation and management of dangerous facilities is an essential element of this plan.

The majority of the members of the Commission are convinced not only that the system they have proposed will give the safeguards needed but that it is the only method by which this desired end can be achieved.

On the other hand the Soviet have put forward a plan which differs fundamentally. They have proposed the immediate outlawing of the atomic bomb and the destruction of existing stocks. After this would have been effected the Soviets concede the need for instituting what they call "strict international control" but their proposals in this connection on detailed examination have been shown to be merely a system of "periodic" visits to such plants only whose existence their respective governments had seen fit to disclose. There was also to be "special" inspection on suspicion but any method of gaining information on which suspicion might be based was carefully excluded.

The Commission's examination of these proposals showed that they would represent only an act of unilateral disarmament by the United States which, even if it were carried out, would give no real assurance that the Soviet or any other country engaged in atomic activities would not or could not secretly make and use the bomb in future.

This conclusion follows from the fact to which I have already referred, namely, that the fissionable materials which are the essential substances for such peaceful applications of atomic energy as the development in the future of atomic power, are also the explosive element of the bomb. In the

absence of effective inspection and control these substances could readily be diverted clandestinely from peaceful to military use by a nation secretly preparing atomic war. Once the fissionable material is available the fabrication of a bomb is a simple operation requiring little time and only ordinary machine facilities.

The majority of the Commission were therefore forced to the conclusion, despite every wish to find a basis of agreement, that they must reject the Soviet proposals as "completely ignoring the existing technical knowledge of the problem or providing an adequate basis for effective international control and the elimination of atomic weapons from national armaments."

Such was the situation in the Atomic Energy Commission in the spring of 1948. The Soviet were adamant against the acceptance of the elements of control which the majority were convinced were necessary and having regard to the far reaching and terrifying consequences of any doubt on these matters, the majority could accept nothing less.

As a result it became evident that the issue should be raised for clarification in the broader forum presented by the Third Session of the General Assembly then due to meet in Paris in September.

In proposing that the Security Council should be invited to accept this course, the majority members of the Commission after reaffirming the correctness of their proposals, pointed out that having concluded that part of their task concerned primarily with scientific and technological matters, they realized that the time had arrived when increased efforts should be made with regard to general considerations, including those of an international political character, the debate on which could be undertaken with greater advantage in the General Assembly of the United Nations itself.

The attempt to solve the atomic energy "impasse" in the Security Council by asking the Council to approve and transmit to the General Assembly the report of the majority of the members of the Atomic Energy Commission met, on June 22, 1948, with the 26th veto exercised by the Soviet Union. However, a procedural motion proposed by Canada to refer the three reports of the Commission to the General Assembly "as a matter of special concern" was passed by a majority of 9-2, and there was thus created an opportunity to test the conclusions of the majority both as regards their technical correctness and also, and most importantly, as to their acceptability to the nations members of the General Assembly.

I come now to the further development of these matters which took place in Paris during September, October, and November last.

In the opening meetings of the General Assembly the Atomic Energy Commission's proposals were given wide support and the urgency of establishing effective control was expressed by many nations other than the Soviet and its satellites whose delegates reiterated their insistence on "prohibition" of atomic weapons and the destruction of existing stocks. They repeated their rejection of the measures which would make control effective because they said that these measures would be an invasion of their sovereignty.

At the Paris meeting the Soviet raised two separate sets of proposals. In the one the prohibition of atomic weapons was combined with a project for an immediate arbitrary reduction of one-third in the conventional armaments of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The discussion of this proposal was principally related to conventional armaments and in the end the fallacies of this approach were fully exposed.

The other Soviet proposal introduced the idea of "simultaneous" conventions, the one for the prohibition of atomic weapons and the other for what the Soviet described as "effective international control." Both conventions were to be signed and to "enter into force and actual operation simultaneously."

Formerly the Soviet had insisted on prohibition and destruction of existing stocks as a first step. Now they claimed that in their new proposals they had made a great concession to promote agreement.

There is no doubt that, for a time, this new Soviet insistence on the word "simultaneous" confused the issue and raised false hopes in the minds of some of those who were anxiously concerned about the future. However in the discussion it soon became evident that the Soviet ideas on what would constitute effective international control had not advanced at all from their previous scheme which had already been subjected to the most meticulous examination as a result of which it had been rejected by the Commission as fundamentally inadequate.

It did not add in the least to the safety of the world to have "simultaneous" control when the elements of that control would lack the character deemed necessary to provide acceptable safeguards which would dispel suspicion and promote co-operation between nations. I can only describe the Soviet proposal as "specious". It was so recognized by a great majority in the General Assembly and decisively rejected. No nation outside the Soviet group voted for it.

The draft resolution put forward by Canada became the framework of the debate and after development in the Political Committee it provided that the Assembly should endorse the relevant portions of the majority proposals of the Atomic Energy Commission "as constituting the necessary basis" of an effective system of international control which would give adequate protection against the hazards of violations and evasions.

The Canadian resolution recognized the practical situation caused by the flat rejection of the Commission's proposals by the Soviet and its consequent inability to make progress in the technical matters within its competence until this "impasse" had been resolved. It recognized that these difficulties were largely political and it therefore provided a political method of endeavour to reconcile the dispute. This was that the six original sponsors should "meet together and consult in order to determine if there exists a basis for agreement on the international control of atomic energy." We proposed that this meeting of the Sponsors should endeavour to determine a basis on which the Commission's work could be resumed.

A number of delegations reminded the General Assembly that the Atomic Energy Commission was not subject to the "veto" and suggested therefore that it should resume its work, ride over any Soviet objections and prepare a Treaty. On the other hand, most delegations supported us in the view that this would be unwise at this time as this procedure would result in accentuating and hardening the divisions of opinion between the Soviet and the rest of the world, and because in fact no agreement which was not universal would be of any value.

However, as the debate developed it became evident that a considerable number of delegations, while not subscribing to the view that the Commission should ride over the Soviet nations on the clauses of the Treaty, nevertheless felt that it would be well for the world if the Atomic Energy Commission remained in session so as to keep the whole of this dangerous situation under constant review. It was thought that if this were done the Commission might even be able to make progress on some aspects of its technical work.

The Canadian Delegation and those who had joined in the sponsorship of our resolution, particularly the U.S.A. and France, were happy to accede to this somewhat more hopeful view of the possibilities of progress and we therefore modified our proposal so as to provide that the Commission would resume its meetings and "proceed to the further study of such of the subjects remaining in its programme of work as it considers to be practicable and useful."

In this form the resolution went to a plenary session of the General Assembly where it received 40 votes in favour to 6 against. Those against included the Soviet and Soviet satellites only. The 12 nations unaccounted for or abstaining include a number who had not yet made up their minds on this complex and difficult subject. A few made reservations because of special interest in uranium and thorium ores and unfortunately a number were absent because the vote came earlier than had been expected. Altogether it is thought that in one form or another some 46 nations expressed in Paris their acceptance, at least in principle, of the majority proposals.

Thus I can say that the novel and far reaching project for the international control of atomic energy which has been evolved by the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission has met with acceptance by the great majority of the nations and we can feel therefore that this project commends itself to the conscience of the world. No nation outside the Soviet bloc has rejected it. This is most important for the future because it is the assurance which we sought when we took this great question to the General Assembly in Paris. We have been given it in generous measure and even the Soviet must now realize that they stand in isolation in their failure to accept the new conceptions of international organization which seem to us to be an inescapable condition for the survival of civilization in this atomic age. Following the conclusion of the 3rd Session of the General Assembly in Paris, the Atomic Energy Commission resumed its meetings in New York and proceeded to a re-examination of its programme of work in the greatest detail in order to determine if there was any further work which it was practicable and useful to undertake and to make doubly certain that no possible misunderstanding of the Soviet position might have stood in the way of agreement.

As those most familiar with the matter expected, these discussions in the Atomic Energy Commission have added nothing to what was known before. The meetings were, however, continued until the patience of the non-permanent members of the Commission became exhausted. The current work of the Commission terminated by a formal resolution proposed by Cuba and Argentina which suspended the meetings of the Commission until such time as the permanent members, after consultations among themselves should certify that a basis for the control of atomic energy existed.

The consultations between the 6 permanent members commenced on August 9, 1949 and have continued through 10 meetings held in closed sessions and with the minimum release of information to the press. The purpose of these strictures was to reduce the possibility of propaganda, in the hope that as a consequence, the statements of the Soviet delegate might become more objective.

The time has now come when a report of these discussions requires to be made to the General Assembly. This matter is under arrangement and it seems likely that the report will be made public early next week, with the General Assembly debate commencing very soon thereafter.

Atomic Energy control is the central issue in the controversy between the Soviet countries and the rest of the world. It is the issue which is causing most anxiety and public attention has been focussed on it by reason of President Truman's statement of August 23. We may expect, therefore, that the debate in the United Nations will be dynamic and difficult and dangerous.

In conclusion I would only wish to re-affirm my faith in the United Nations plan of control as approved at Paris. Every subsequent study has given increased evidence of the validity of the solution which it presents -- and equally of the certainty that there is no other safe procedure. I know that this is the conviction also of the other four Permanent Members of the Commission who think alike with us -- China, France, U.K., and U.S.A. It must be our first concern to insure that this issue is placed squarely before the Assembly unobscured by the nebulous suggestions of some well intentioned people who either do not see the dangers of the situation or who incline to an approach similar to the discredited Kellogg-Briand Pact of the 1920's. We cannot afford confusion of thought or unrealistic action in the face of the serious menace which lies behind the Iron Curtain. There is as yet no reason for undue anxiety because in technical matters we still have a substantial margin of advantage over the Soviet, a margin which we believe to be increasing. In consequence therefore there is a little time left which can safely be given to the process of education and persuasion. We must use it to the best advantage in an endeavour to carry, even yet, conviction to the peoples of the Soviet.

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