

- 2 -

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 54/47/UN9/24 FORCED LABOUR

Text of a statement on December 11, 1954, by Mrs. K.G. Montgomery, Canadian Representative in the Third Committee of the ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, on agenda item 30 - Forced Labour: Report of the Economic and Social Council

Note: The text of the resolution adopted by the Committee and the results of the voting are included in the end of the statement.

As one of the sponsors of the resolution before the Committee, the Canadian Delegation would like to express once again its genuine concern over the existence of forced labour in many areas of the world. The evidence which has been collected by the Ad Hoc Committee in this matter is shocking. The Committee's inquiries have revealed that facts relating to systems of forced labour exist and that those government which make use of forced labour, whether as a means of political coercion, punishment for holding or expressing political views or for important economic purposes, are committing a contravention of the obligations and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. The Committee also found that apart from the physical suffering and hardship involved, what made the system of forced labour "most dangerous to human freedom and dignity is that it trespasses on the inner convictions and ideas of persons to the extent of forcing them to change their opinions, convictions and even mental attitudes to the satisfaction of the state"; moreover, it was bound to lower gradually the status and dignity of even the free workers in countries where it was applied.

As far as we know this evidence has not been wiped out and the facts pointed out by the distinguished Delegate of the United States this morning give us additional proof of the existence of forced labour! We have been informed during this debate as indeed during previous debates of the progress made in certain countries in certain fields of activity. But the data which was given to us in these instances had little if any relevance to the points under discussion. Mr. Chairman, my country is also one in which great strides have been made in recent decades in many fields. Our manufacturing industries have made tremendous progress recently and our national revenue has reached a level which could hardly be dreamed only a few years ago. We also like to think that we have made a useful contribution to the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. And, partly as a result of all that, our cultural life is making substantial progress. But we do not regard any of this as evidence that there is no forced labour within our borders. Nor do we consider that the existence of comic strips in many countries including Canada is proof that forced labour exists there.

We are not concerned here at this stage with what people read. What matters is whether or not there are slave labourers. We are still waiting for relevant evidence that the situation reported in the Ad Hoc Committee's report has been remedied!

To our mind the existence of forced labour can be regarded as an integral part of any system which is not founded on a truly democratic basis and where as a consequence fundamental freedoms cannot be recognized both in theory and in practice.

We fully endorse the condemnation by the Economic and Social Council of the existence of systems of forced labour. As long as such systems exist it will be for the United Nations to take appropriate action with a view to bringing about their elimination and at the same time genuine respect for one of the fundamental human rights.

In a period of history which has witnessed the abolition of slavery, the admirable work of the International Labour Organization, the proclamation of fundamental freedoms in the United Nations Charter and more emphatically in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the situation described in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee is all the more disturbing. This situation cannot be ignored by any delegation which is sensitive to the sufferings of millions of human beings. That is why, Mr. Chairman, we call upon these delegations to give their full support of resolution A/C.3/L456 which is before the Committee.

Voting Results

Following is the text of the resolution (U.N. Doc. A/RESOLUTION/287) which was adopted by the Third Committee on December 15 by a vote of 31 in favour (including Canada) to 5 against, with 12 abstentions and adopted on December 17 in a plenary session of the General Assembly on the report of the Third Committee (U.N. Doc. A/2878) by a vote of 41 in favour to 5 against, with 10 abstentions:

Text of Resolution

The General Assembly,

Having noted Economic and Social Council resolution 524 (XVII) of 27 April 1954 concerning the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour,

1. Endorses the condemnation by the Economic and Social Council of the existence of systems of forced labour which are employed as a means of political coercion or punishment for holding or expressing political views, and which are on such a scale as to constitute an important element in the economy of a given country;

2. Requests the Economic and Social Council and the International Labour Organisation to continue their efforts towards the abolition of such systems of forced labour;

3. Supports the Council's appeal to all Governments to re-examine their laws and administrative practices in the light of present conditions and the increasing desire of the peoples of the world to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person;

4. Expresses its satisfaction with the action taken by the Economic and Social Council in requesting the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Labour Office to prepare a further report on this subject for consideration by the Council at its nineteenth session, setting out:

(a) Whatever replies are received from Governments in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 740 (VIII) of 7 December 1953;

(b) Any new information on systems of forced labour which might be submitted by Member States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations in consultative status, together with any comments submitted by the Governments concerned.



2. Requests the Economic and Social Council and the International Labour Organisation to continue their efforts towards the abolition of such systems of forced labour;

3. Supports the Council's appeal to all Governments to re-examine their laws and administrative practices in the light of present conditions and the increasing desire of the peoples of the world to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person;

4. Expresses its satisfaction with the action taken by the Economic and Social Council in requesting the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Labour Office to prepare a further report on this subject for consideration by the Council at its nineteenth session, setting out:

(a) Whatever replies are received from Governments in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 740 (VIII) of 7 December 1953;

(b) Any new information on systems of forced labour which might be submitted by Member States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations in consultative status, together with any comments submitted by the Governments concerned.