

No. 53/57

FORCED LABOUR

Text of a statement given on November 25, 1953, in the Third Committee of the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, by the Canadian Representative, Mrs. A.L. Caldwell, on agenda Item 69 - Evidence of Existence of Forced Labour.

NOTE: Voting results and text of the resolution adopted are given at the end of the statement.

The Canadian Delegation supports wholeheartedly the resolution now before us. In our opinion it should be clearly recognized for what it is, a resolution of a procedural character, underscoring the urgency of the problem of forced labour, and requesting the ECOSOC and ILO to give it the high priority which it deserves at their forthcoming meetings. This is obviously the only kind of resolution which the Third Committee can consider at this stage, since the report of the Ad Hoc Committee is not itself officially before us, nor are the findings of the ECOSOC and ILO available for consideration by the General Assembly. These factors make it unnecessary and in fact unwise, in our opinion, for detailed debate to take place at this session either on the contents of the report, or on the more controversial parts of the Ad Hoc Committee's findings. There are of course certain facts which have emerged in the course of the last few years with regard to forced labour, facts which are now beyond dispute, if not beyond controversy. These facts do not depend on the conclusions or findings of the Ad Hoc Committee. They emerge clearly from the legislation and from the policies of the governments concerned.

It is, for example, a simple statement of fact that "forced labour camps" exist in Czechoslovakia. Section 36 of Act No. 86 of 1950 (the Penal Code) of that country, entitled "Committal to Forced Labour Camps" expressly refers to and recognizes the existence of "forced labour camps" as places to which persons 18 years of age and over, after completing their full sentence of temporary deprivation of liberty, may be committed for additional periods of so-called "re-education" for as long as three months to two years (pp. 228-229 of Ad Hoc Committee Report: see also p.34).

It is of course true that in October 1952 these "forced labour camps" were officially given a new name. They are now officially known as "transitional camps", whatever that means. I do not of course know why it was that the Czech authorities decided to make this change of name: it may or may not have had something to do with the interest now being taken by the United Nations in the problem of forced labour. Whatever the reasons for the change of name I can do no better than to recall the words of the representative of the U.S.S.R. the other day when he reminded this Committee that "A rose by any other name smells just as sweet".

I have given just one example - a factual example which depends in no way on the right of the Ad Hoc Committee for its authenticity - to indicate that forced labour policies do in fact exist in certain countries of the world. I could give many other factual examples. It is these facts, and these alone, rather than the welter of irrelevant considerations that have been introduced in this debate that should be foremost in the minds of members of this Committee when they vote on the resolution now before us.

May I say a word in conclusion as to the reasons for urgency in this matter.

Why does the Canadian Delegation consider that action on the report of the Ad Hoc Committee is "a matter of urgency" as stated in the words of paragraph 7 of the draft resolution now before us? This is the crux of the problem which we are now considering; and the reason for urgency, in our opinion, lies in the simple fact that this problem of forced labour has become worse, not better, in the years since the Economic and Social Council first took cognizance of it. Why do I say this,? The problem of forced labour was first brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council at its sixth session in 1948; in the six year period 1948 - 1953 no less than six important nations of the world - some of them members of the United Nations - containing within their boundaries between 200 and 300 millions of peoples have passed legislation establishing and extending by law, under the guise of penal codes and labour codes and other enactments, systems of forced labour, which affect ever increasing numbers of once free people. Once again these are not matters of opinion: they are simple matters of fact as shown in the Ad Hoc Committee's report. The references to these numerous enactments and the dates on which they were passed are plainly stated and documented. In many areas during the past few years and documented. In many areas into existence, humanity has pushed forward the frontiers of freedom: but in the field of forced labour in 1948, in 1949, in 1950, in 1951, and 1952, humanity has marched backwards. These are the hard facts which give to this problem a sense of urgency which no delegation, sensitive to the sufferings of millions of our fellow human beings, can afford to ignore. These are the considerations which are foremost in the minds of the Canadian Delegation in voting for paragraph 7 of the resolution now before us.

....., the fact that the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, the Ukraine S.S.R., Poland thought it advisable to enter, at this stage of the debate, into the substance of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee in such details is, we would like to think, an indication that our view of the importance and urgency of this problem now before us appears to be shared by many other delegations around this table. There is at least general agreement as to the importance and urgency of the matter now before this Committee. The Canadian Delegation wishes to join with other delegations in an appeal to all members of the United Nations to cooperate with the Organization in studying the means and taking concrete steps toward the solution of the forced labour problem. In our view this is of such an humanitarian importance that it transcends ideological concepts and

political systems. It is our sincere hope that in voting for the draft resolution now before us we are taking a decision which is expected by all those who believe in human dignity and who stand against punishment on the grounds of political, cultural and religious ideologies.

Voting Results

The Third Committee adopted on November 27, 1953, by a vote of 36 in favour (including Canada) to 5 against (Soviet bloc) with 10 abstentions a resolution (Doc. A/C.3/L.395) by which the Assembly affirms the importance it attaches to the abolition of all systems of forced labour. The resolution was sponsored by Australia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Greece, Pakistan, United Kingdom and United States.

When the resolution came up in plenary session, it was approved without change by a vote of 40 in favour (including Canada), 5 against (Soviet bloc) with 12 abstentions (the Arab group, India, South Africa and Argentina).

Text of Resolution

Following is the text of the resolution:

The General Assembly,

Recalling the determination of the peoples of the United Nations under the Charter to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

Regretting that the Economic and Social Council at its sixteenth session was unable to consider the conclusions contained in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour,

Considering that systems of forced labour constitute a serious threat to fundamental human rights and jeopardize the freedom and status of workers in contravention of the obligations and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations,

Observing that the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour has now been placed on the agenda of the seventeenth session of the Economic and Social Council and of the 123rd session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office,

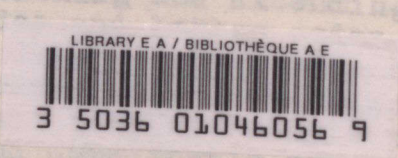
Considering that in view of this delay there is still time for certain governments which have not yet done so to provide information in response to the Ad Hoc Committee's request for comments and observations on the allegations concerning them,

Affirms the importance which it attaches to the abolition of all systems of forced or "corrective" labour, whether employed as a means of political coercion or punishment for holding or expressing political views or on such a scale as to constitute an important element in the economy of a country,

Invites the Economic and Social Council and the International Labour Organisation, as a matter of urgency, to give early consideration to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour at their next sessions with this aim in view,

Requests the Secretary-General to consult with governments who have not yet found it possible to provide information in response to the Ad Hoc Committee's request to the effect that they submit such information before the seventeenth session of the Economic and Social Council so that these replies may be brought to the attention of the Council, and

Requests the Economic and Social Council to report on forced labour to the ninth session of the General Assembly.



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