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UNITED ACTION FOR PEACEFUL ACTION

An address by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, made to the Ottawa Branch of the United Nations Association in Canada, February 4, 1953.

For a quarter of a century I have followed at close hand the two valiant attempts to find a formula for lasting peace. The League of Nations failed. Because the consequence of further failure is so terrible, the United Nations was founded on the determination that it must not fail. Its success or failure depends, in large measure, on public support and on the activities of organizations like the United Nations Association in Canada which encourage an intelligent interest in its work.

The Seventh Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which convened last October in New York, now stands adjourned. Late this month, the Assembly itself and one of its six Committees will reconvene to deal with the ten items still remaining on the agenda. In this interval between meetings it seems appropriate to ask: "Has anything been achieved?"

Today there are many persons -- not all behind the Iron Curtain -- who ask whether the U.N. can survive. Some even ask whether it should survive. It is this question that I shall attempt to answer tonight. Before looking at it in long-range terms, let me consider its relevance to the current Session. I shall try to cut through all the detail and discussion to point out what I am convinced are the really significant and concrete accomplishments of our recent meetings.

For me, this Assembly offered a striking contrast to other Sessions I had attended. The United Nations, once an awkward adolescent, had undergone the subtle change that signifies "growing up". Time and again this coming of age was reflected in the attitude of most delegations and by the maturity of the debates.

I would be the first to concede that the U.N. still has its shortcomings and limitations. Even at this Session, some issues were not squarely faced; others were raised only to be postponed. But, nevertheless, the total effect was still forward. The main lines of effort were certainly worthwhile. And here I might say that great credit for the success of our deliberations belongs to my colleague, Mr. Pearson, who filled the Assembly's highest post with such distinction.

In my mind, there have been four outstanding achievements so far in this Session:

- (1) A number of big and important issues have been aired without wars or walk-outs.
- (2) The attempt to find a peaceful settlement in Korea, while not yet successful, has united the free world as never before.
- (3) There has been increasing contact between nations and groups of nations previously isolated from one another.
- (4) The patently obstructionist attitude of the Soviet bloc has sharpened the world's perception in distinguishing shameless propaganda from honest strivings for peace.

To me, the most vital service that the U.N. is giving humanity is to let light in on the affairs of nations.

How terrible could have been the history of the past seven years if the nations had not stood under the steady, searching light of world scrutiny! There can be no question that, because of the existence of the United Nations, some conflicts have been avoided, others have been brought to a speedy end, others have been kept from growing into global wars.

Because of the moral force this organization has mobilized, millions are at peace who might have been plunged into war; millions are free who might have been enslaved. Nations have found freedom that might have been left in subjection. The tyranny that disease and hunger and poverty and ignorance hold over men has been effectively lessened through the work of the many humanitarian agencies of the United Nations.

One of the great advantages of world debate is that it educates the ordinary men and women of this earth in the way in which nations behave. Under the revealing searchlight of world opinion the true colours of Communism, for example, are starkly evident. World debate has brought the rulers of the Red empire out where we can see and study them. It has tempted them beyond the Iron Curtain, beyond the vast Kremlin-run concentration camp of Soviet states and satellites to defend their views in the market-place of the world.

Communist propaganda does not wear well. A lie, however big, cannot live long. In time truth will prevail. In the long run, the twists and turns of the sinuous, cynical Soviet line and the brutalities and failures of its system will disgust all except those whose senses have been drugged and dulled by the opiate of Communism's false promises and empty dreams.

Only the truth can make men free. That is why we must continue every effort in the councils of the United Nations to set the record straight, to identify poisonous propaganda, and to speak up for what our people and all people -- even the mute millions of Russia and Russian-run minions -- believe in their hearts.

The U.N. is a symbol of our conviction that man can meet together and reason together, and find common ground for co-operative action. If the United Nations -- or some such world agency -- cannot succeed, then peace is impossible.

We have not found complete security in the United Nations -- but unless we continue to seek security we shall never find it. Within the terms of the Charter of this world organization, we have developed an area of greater collective security for the nations of the North Atlantic community. Canada and the nations associated with us in NATO are building a realistic defence programme, not for war, but to safeguard national security without war. But even as we make sure of security in our own part of the world, we must work unceasingly to extend it further. The quest for permanent peace must go on.

Looking at it from a Canadian point of view, I believe that this Session has been one of the most significant in the history of the United Nations. Throughout the Session, Canada has spoken with a voice of its own and on several occasions our delegation offered direction in reconciling divergent views on major issues. We also extended the practice of consulting informally with the representatives of other countries in an effort to promote greater understanding and good will between the various delegations.

I am afraid that, at times, we may have confounded our friends by voting with unaccustomed independence and strength of purpose. As an illustration, I might point to the forthright stand taken by the Canadian delegation on the competence of the U.N. to consider certain matters. We maintained, for instance, that the General Assembly had authority to discuss and even to make recommendations on the questions of Morocco and Tunisia and the problem of racial discrimination in South Africa. On the other hand, we indicated our respect for the rights of individual nations by clearly distinguishing between the propriety of discussion of a problem in the Assembly and interference by the U.N. in the purely domestic affairs of a member state.

In colonial matters, Canada -- in view of its own comparatively recent emergence to full nationhood -- was particularly well-suited to the role of impressing on the Assembly the importance of giving full consideration to the complex problems now facing many dependent peoples. Our stand on these matters was watched with the closest interest in view of our position in the Commonwealth. As a full and equal partner, we helped to strengthen the unity of the Commonwealth nations while, at the same time, reserving our right to act freely within the dictates of our own conscience.

In the economic and social fields, Canada continued to give its full support to constructive programmes aimed at raising standards of living in less-favoured nations. In what we are doing through the United Nations Technical Assistance Plan and similar programmes, we are, of course, supplementing the action already taken by Canada and other nations of the Commonwealth under the Colombo Plan.

Viewing the Seventh Session of the Assembly in broad world terms, there is real reason for considerable satisfaction. It met at a critical time in world affairs when the long-protracted peace talks at Panmunjom had reached a stalemate and when, in certain other parts of the world, freedom and security were in jeopardy. It was therefore most gratifying

that the majority of member nations immediately applied themselves with determination and singleness of purpose to the formidable task of seeking satisfactory solutions to these problems -- solutions that would be consistent with justice, honour and the principles of the U.N. Charter.

The Korean issue, better than anything else, underlines the closing of ranks among the free nations and the complete isolation of Soviet Russia and its satellites from those nations that are honestly seeking peace.

I cannot stress too much the unanimity of purpose displayed by all members of the United Nations with the exception of the Soviet bloc. There was unanimity in the desire for peace. There was unanimity on the necessity for a realistic armistice agreement. There was unanimity that hostilities should be brought to an end as quickly as possible in Korea. Finally, there was unanimity that the sole issue holding up an armistice agreement, the prisoner-of-war issue, must be resolved on terms that would guarantee the sanctity of the individual's free will.

The prisoner-of-war issue had a significance apart from its immediate importance to the settlement of the Korean problem. Seven years ago, the Prime Minister of this country, together with the representatives of many other countries, signed the United Nations Charter. In doing so, we not only pledged our support to an organization dedicated to keep the peace through the implementation of the collective security principle, but we re-affirmed our faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

The prisoner-of-war problem in itself was a concrete test of the sincerity of that affirmation. Human beings were being detained in prisoner-of-war camps in Korea for long and weary months while lengthy negotiations concerning their future were underway. United Nations negotiators at Panmunjom, knowing that some prisoners would resist return to Communist control because of the fate that would await them, took the firm stand that no prisoner-of-war could be forced at the point of bayonet to return to the other side. The Communist Command for its part insisted that all prisoners-of-war should be returned regardless of their individual wishes.

Stripped of all the mumbo-jumbo of Russian rhetoric, here is the issue:

Will the Korean war prisoners be set free
or will some be driven to other prisons,
to vengeful privations and even death?

Since Communism was first concocted, no such acid test has yet emerged by which to test its Uriah Heep concern for suffering humanity.

In the discussions of the Assembly, I took issue with the stand of the chief Soviet delegate, Mr. Andrei Vyshinsky, on the repatriation of prisoners-of-war. In my examination of what he had said, I asked whether, in all humanity, he seriously proposed that any prisoner unwilling to return to his Communist-controlled homeland should be driven there by troops of either side under orders to club, bayonet or shoot him if he resisted.

It was in an attempt to find some way out of the impasse which had developed on this issue at Panmunjom and in New York that the Government of India empowered its delegation to the U.N. to put forward a resolution which was finally adopted by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly and was opposed only by members of the Soviet bloc. No single resolution on Korea in the U.N. ever received such overwhelming support.

That resolution contained a clear statement of the principle that force should not be used against prisoners-of-war to effect or prevent their return to their homelands. It also contained an expression of the anxiety of the General Assembly "to expedite and facilitate convening of the Political Conference as provided in Article 60 of the draft Armistice Agreement."

The Indian resolution was clearly directed towards achieving a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible and in a context to ensure that a lasting armistice would ensure. It provided against any possibility that prisoners-of-war should become pawns in the settlement of the political issues to be faced later. Finally it provided a blueprint for the machinery of repatriation.

The Government of the United States, as the government to which the U.N. gave responsibility for the setting up of the Unified Command, clearly indicated its real desire to achieve an armistice. While not fully convinced of the value of every provision of the resolution, the U.S. Secretary of State nevertheless accepted the resolution, affirming that, if we worked in harmony and goodwill, a solution to the prisoner-of-war issue could be found.

In blunt and depressing contrast to this attitude was the intransigence of the Soviet Union and its satellites who, in spite of all their pietistical propaganda for peace, made every effort to slam the door on the prospect of achieving peace in Korea.

Following its passage by an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly, the Indian resolution was forwarded by Mr. Pearson, as President of the Assembly, to the North Korean and Chinese Communist authorities. The Chinese Government at Peking rejected the President's appeal on December 14 and the North Koreans took the same action a week later. Although an armistice has not been achieved, the sincerity of the attempt, which had the backing of 54 member nations, leaves the world in no doubt as to where the responsibility for the continuation of the fighting lies.

That the Soviet Government itself recognized the vote on the Indian resolution as a major defeat and felt its impact is indicated by their last-minute propaganda manoeuvre of introducing a resolution accusing the United States of "mass murder" of Korean prisoners-of-war at Pongam. The true measure of this charge is seen in the fact that it did not gain a single favourable vote from outside the Soviet bloc.

I have dealt at some length with the Korean prisoner-of-war issue because, better than anything else, it has shown the world who is for war and who for peace. It has revealed the ugly face of war behind the false face of Communist concern for peace.

How then, in the face of the duplicity, the elaborate concealments, the sound and fury that accompany Communist diplomacy, can we hope to achieve anything constructive through the United Nations? I have already indicated why I think the Seventh Session has been worthwhile. Let me now briefly take a long-range view of our future prospects for progress along the peaceful paths free men long to travel.

To put it simply, the U.N. must survive, for it is the only remaining point of contact between the free world and the Communist bloc. We all recognize how imperfect are our communications with one another, but how much worse would it be if there were no U.N. and no common meeting place between East and West.

It is perhaps too much to hope that any words or deeds of ours can influence those trained in the sorry statecraft of the Soviet. We can hope, however, that, little by little, the world will come to know the Russian line for what it is -- an enormous and vastly expensive effort to sell the world a bill of goods. U.N. debate gives this fact a chance to get through to the vast masses of men and women throughout the world who, feeling the first stirrings of freedom, are seeking a system in which they can put their faith.

In determining man's future destiny, these unpledged millions hold the deciding vote. It is not enough to puncture the hollow pretences of Communism. We must prove to these peoples that the democratic way offers them a surer path to the future. This can only be done if our words at the United Nations so match our actions here at home that all the world can see how genuine is our respect for freedom, tolerance and human personality. Communism is a tireless and skilful exploiter of peoples. As its record of failure lengthens, persuasion, fear and military exploitation widen the reach of its empire. But through the United Nations, and in other ways, light is being let in on its workings and men and women the world over are growing daily more sick of it.

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