

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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GOVERNMENT

CANADA

No. 49/41. Statement on the France-Canada Resolution on Atomic Energy, made on November 7, 1949, in the Ad Hoc Political Committee by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Canadian Government has for some years been actively concerned with the problems of atomic energy. We have long been conscious of the terrible dangers in the possible use of this energy for destructive purposes; conscious too of the great promise to mankind which the development of this energy for peaceful purposes holds out.

As long ago as November 15, 1945, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada joined in a proposal that the United Nations should work out specific proposals to safeguard humanity from the dangers and provide humanity with the benefits which a positive development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes would give.

As you know, proposals which we think adequate for this good purpose have been worked out, and were approved last year by a large majority of the General Assembly. But in this matter, approval by a majority of states, however impressive, is not enough. If humanity is to be made secure from the dangers of atomic destruction, all nations must agree on measures which we know can be, and will be, implemented by all. To put the matter another way, if the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. do not agree on a plan for ensuring that there will not be an atomic arms race, there will be no such plan and there will be such a race, without any winner!

The position of my government on the United Nations plan for the control of atomic energy which was approved last year and the prohibition and elimination of atomic weapons is well known. In common with most of the members of the United Nations, we are prepared to accept that plan. We are convinced that it is a good plan. We certainly do not, however, claim omniscience on this subject, nor is our thinking concerning it rigid and inflexible. Indeed the problem of atomic energy is such that it seems to me that all of us should seek its solution with humility as well as with sincerity. If any new proposals are made or new approaches suggested that give promise of an effective and agreed solution for this problem, then my government will welcome them and examine them with all the care which they will deserve.

At the moment, however, as the President of the Assembly has stated, "the effort to solve this problem is stalled at dead centre". A political deadlock has developed between the U.S.S.R. and its associates on the one hand, and the majority of

us on the other. Nor has that deadlock anything to do with the fact that one side has or has not a monopoly of atomic energy.

It has been obvious for many years that no single nation could long have a monopoly in atomic weapons because no single nation has, or can have, a monopoly in brains, or wisdom or energy. This point was made clear in the 1945 Three-Power statement to which I have referred. The United Nations policy on atomic energy has been developed on this assumption. The recent atomic explosion in the Soviet Union does, however, point up dramatically the validity of the thesis that security can be found only in effective international control. Nations on both sides of the chasm which at present so tragically divides the world now have the secret of the power which can smash that world. In an atmosphere of tension and fear and mistrust, that knowledge is being harnessed to the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. This is the supreme menace that faces us, and it will increase if an atomic arms race is allowed to continue. The stock piles will grow, giving a fitful sense of security on one side, and threatening insecurity to the other. Your defence becomes my danger, and my defensive reaction to that danger seems to threaten your security.

There is, of course, only one final solution to this problem; the development of political conditions that will make war unnecessary and hence unthinkable. If war does come, international control of atomic energy will disappear along with every other kind of control. It is idle and misleading to cite to the contrary the Geneva poison gas conventions. No gas bomb ever killed 50,000 persons or held out such a terrible temptation to total and quick victory as atomic supremacy does. In any event, surely no one is going to argue in this Assembly that the Nazis, who broke every other law of God and man, observed the poison gas convention out of a decent regard for international morality and the observance of international conventions.

Yet it is defeatism to think we can do nothing except sit back and hope that war won't occur. We can remove some of the fear and insecurity that breeds conflict by taking the development of atomic energy for destructive purposes out of the individual control of national governments and turning it over to an international agency which will act, by agreement, as a trustee for the separate nations. This, to us, seems to be the only way to ensure that at least there will never be in the future an atomic Pearl Harbor or an atomic June 22, 1941. It removes the menace of a sudden, surprise atomic aggression. On this principle the "majority plan" rests. It is also the principle that has inspired the Resolution which you have before you in the name of the French and Canadian delegations.

How can we work out an international arrangement based on this principle? At the present, the two camps are deadlocked on this issue. How can we break that deadlock? The answer to this question - it will have to be more political than technical - will not be easy to find. We know that now, but we must try to find it.

The resolution which the French and Canadian delegations have put forward lays down certain principles which in our view should be accepted if progress is to be made. It also provides for a new and vigorous examination of the problem by the permanent members of the Atomic Energy Commission. This new examination must be made in the light of present circumstances, one of the most important of which is the insistent demand of the people and the governments represented at this Assembly that, to use General Romulo's words again, "the means for controlling the

destructive potentialities of this new force, must be found".

One of the principles embodied in our joint resolution is that we must keep open every channel for consultation and negotiation. We must not close any door.

The second principle is that we must also not close our minds. We must explore all possible avenues which give any promise of leading to a satisfactory solution to this vital problem. The Atomic Energy Commission must be prepared to consider any suggestion which could contribute to such a solution. The members of that Commission should be willing and anxious as I know they would be willing and anxious to examine ideas from any source, whether from an officer of the General Assembly, or from any government, or from the press, or from any individual in any part of the world.

There is another vital principle which I suggest we must bear in mind. It is important that we do not mislead the world on this major issue. It would be heartless and it would be dangerous to give mankind the impression that atomic energy is under international control, if in effect it is not controlled; to pretend that nations are secure from the destructive power of atomic energy if they are not. We discovered in a hard and tragic way in the 1930's that a false sense of security, among peace-loving peoples, can encourage aggression; that this false sense of security can be the precursor to war. It would be no contribution to the peace of the world in present conditions of international mistrust and fear to encourage illusions of peace based merely on unsupported declarations against the use of atomic energy for war. If the situation was such that such declarations could accomplish their purpose, their high purpose, then there really wouldn't be any need for them at all.

The United Nations cannot afford, on this matter, to get irresponsibly, or to gamble with the peace of the world. We must be prepared to consider all ideas, but it is no less important that we should not be deceived by partial or temporary solutions, which may appear superficially attractive, and the stated purpose of which we all long to achieve. This is not a case of "save the surface and you save all".

A particular weapon, whether it is an atom bomb or a hundred and fifty infantry divisions, fully armed and equipped, may, in a bad international climate, be considered by those who possess it - and with sincerity - not as an instrument of aggression, but as a deterrent to aggression.

The deterrent of armed force is not, of course, in the long run, the right or safe road to peace. Peace, to be enduring must be based, not on the external restraints of force, but on the internal restraints of free men and women who have the will to peace in their heart; who live in a world where the area of collective international authority is widening; who have adequate access to information on which to judge rightly the issues of foreign policy, and, above all, who have the power to control their governments rather than to be controlled by them. Some day, peace must be based on the truly firm foundation of an open, co-operating, free world community, where men and women of all lands will trust each other, because, among other things, they will be allowed to get to know each other; where they will be permitted to exchange ideas and opinions without the interference of an all-powerful internal propaganda machine.

Until we have international trust founded on this kind

of understanding, the United Nations atomic policy must be based on something more than the unverifiable pledge of member governments that atomic energy, under national control, will not be used for war. Without international confidence, pledges against war, or methods of war, are useless and often worse than useless.

Acceptance of the validity of this principle is the reason why the majority of the Atomic Energy Commission, and the majority of the Assembly, have insisted on effective controls, on effective safeguards, as the prelude to prohibition, temporary or permanent.

The Soviet Delegation tell us that they too want effective control. But it is at facts, not at words alone, that we must look, and the facts of the Soviet position in this matter suggest to us that their acceptance of effective control is based on a distortion of the meaning of those words.

The Soviet proposals for control admit only of fixed periodic inspection, and even that inspection is merely of such facilities as the national governments concerned may choose to declare to an international authority. The Soviet proposals also include I admit special investigations, when there is evidence of illegal activity. But how is such evidence to be obtained? If we had enough confidence to convince us that it would be given automatically by every national government to an international agency, then we would have so much confidence that we would not need any international control at all.

The Soviet provisions regarding inspection seem to us, in short, to be simply not good enough to accomplish the purpose which we all have in mind.

The leader of the Soviet delegation, Mr. Vishinsky, who has a very penetrating mind, made some interesting observations the other day, in the First Committee of this Assembly on the inadequacy of periodic inspection. Discussing in the course of the debate on the Greek question, the possibility of confirming by inspection that the Albanian authorities had interned and disarmed Greek guerrillas who had fled to their territory, Mr. Vishinsky said (I quote from the verbatim record):

"You say: well, then we have no guarantees that these partisans may not rise again and suddenly crop up in our territory. If so, what guarantee do you have that you (that is, the International Commission) will not be shown several thousand interned persons, and as soon as the Commission will leave, they will be permitted to arm and will be led into your territory? What guarantee do you have against that? What does this mean, disarmed and interned? Disarmed means that they were deprived of their weapons. Right? If they are deprived of their weapons today, what safeguards do you have, to follow your own argument, that they will not be given an opportunity tomorrow, to re-arm?"

I suggest therefore to the Soviet representative on the Atomic Energy Commission and on this Committee that the same principles of inspection apply to control in the atomic field, though the consequences of the evasion of ineffective control would be immeasurably more important.

Let me give one other example of what appears to be if understand it right the Soviet Government's idea of inspection. Last month the Security Council was discussing a proposal, worked

out by the Conventional Armaments Commission, to exchange information on national armaments, as a first step to working out an agreement on balanced disarmament. This proposal contained a provision for verification of the information, by international inspection. This provision was attacked by the Soviet Delegation on the grounds that it would amount to international espionage and an infringement of national sovereignty.

Our position is that the only kind of inspection which will be adequate to convince people that international control plans and policy are observed is that which gives far-reaching powers to the inspectors, while providing against the abuse of those powers. They, the inspectors, will be the agents of the international conscience and the international community, and no government, which is sincere in this matter of international control of atomic energy, as we all are, would want to restrict or restrain them so that they could not discharge their duties efficiently.

There is another principle in our resolution, and I am talking not only of broad principles, which does, I admit, involve a derogation from national sovereignty. Our resolution says that national control and operation of atomic energy facilities is a danger to humanity. Believing this, we agree that there should be international operation. This aspect of the subject will, no doubt, be thoroughly discussed in this debate. Here I would merely state that if, notwithstanding the special danger from the ease by which atomic energy can be diverted from productive to destructive use, it can be shown that national operation with complete 100 per cent inspection would not be a menace to security, then we should be glad to re-examine the position. So far, after many months of hard and detailed study, we have not been convinced that this is the case. I would point out also that international operation and management is not the same as ownership, in the individual or national meaning of that word. The international operating agency would be the trustee of the nations who had agreed by treaty to its establishment and to its powers, and it would distribute the products of its operations for peaceful use in a manner determined by treaty or convention.

It is, I suggest, absurd to argue - as the Soviet Delegation has argued - that such renunciations of national sovereignty - if you wish to call them that - are a sacrifice or a humiliation to any state which believes in international co-operation and collective security.

Acceptance by agreement of international control and operation of atomic energy facilities and full international inspection to ensure that agreements made are being carried out, that is no surrender of anything. On the contrary, it is a great step forward towards confidence and peace. This is not losing sovereignty; it is using sovereignty. It is not a loss; it is a gain. To think and to act otherwise is to fly in the face of all the experience of this century, where the progress we have made has been in the direction of widening the area of international authority. Our very presence here today proves that.

Insistence on reactionary concepts of sovereignty is not good enough in the modern world and it has been expressly disavowed in the last paragraph of our resolution which pledges all nations to renounce the "individual exercise of such rights of national sovereignty in the control of atomic energy as are incompatible with the promotion of world security and peace". World security, everyone now admits, requires international control of atomic energy and by our resolution, rights of national

sovereignty must not be permitted to stand in the way of such control. Surely, no one can refuse to accept that principle. To put it another way, in this resolution we state in effect that in the field of atomic energy we can have no solution that does not involve a willingness on the part of all governments to exercise their rights, co-operatively rather than individually. No amount of double talk or sophistry can obscure the essential truth of this statement. If any Delegation, by insistence on a reactionary and negative interpretation of national sovereignty, frustrates the effort we are making to ensure that atomic energy shall be used only for peaceful purposes, it will bear a very heavy responsibility.

The final principle which I want to mention, and which underlies the resolution which we are putting forward, is that we must not give way to despair or defeatism in this matter. It may even well be that the development of atomic energy in the U.S.S.R. may hasten agreement, by giving the rulers of that country more knowledge of the fateful implications for good or for evil, of this power, and more understanding of the scientific processes which any adequate system of control must take firmly into account. As Soviet knowledge and experience grows, and as our own sincere desire to find an agreed solution becomes understood, the Assembly and the Soviet plans may be brought closer together.

This process might be facilitated if the permanent members of the Atomic Energy Commission could examine in greater detail than heretofore the positive and constructive side of atomic energy development. There is, of course, much still to be learned in this field, but it is clear already that this development holds the promise of great good for mankind. The secrecy which must surround this subject as long as security considerations remain paramount will, of course, interfere with such an examination. Nevertheless, even with this limitation, some valuable work could be done. We could at least find out how political insecurity hampers the development of atomic science; hinders the spread of knowledge, and the sharing of facilities among those nations most in need of technical assistance and industrial development. To these nations the promise of atomic energy applied to the arts of peace is of particular importance. To them, there should be great hope in the international co-operative effort for the peaceful exploitation of such energy, which the "majority plan" provides.

I have suggested that this Committee in dealing with the present difficult situation should be guided by certain considerations -- keeping the door open; keeping our minds open; maintaining our sense of responsibility and refusing to gamble with the peace and security of the men and women, all over the world, whom we here represent. I have stressed the dangers that would arise if we should mislead the world.

It seems to me, however, that we must not only avoid misleading world public opinion. We must seek positively to inform it on this vital subject. In this connection, I would commend, for careful study not only by delegates here, but by people everywhere, the statement recently submitted to the Assembly by the representatives of China, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and my own country. This document records our views on the results of the consultations held during the past few months with the representatives of the Soviet Union on atomic energy. It represents, I think, the clearest short presentation yet made on this very difficult topic. It is not in any sense the last word, but it would make a good starting point for those who wish to learn something about the background and the present situation in this field. This basic knowledge, may, I suggest,

form a starting point for new ideas, from new sources, which may help us in our further work.

A great atomic scientist, Dr. Leo Szilard who watched the successful experiment which heralded the large scale liberation of atomic energy later said:

"That night there was very little doubt in my mind the world was headed for grief."

But in more hopeful vein he added:

"Politics has been defined as the art of the possible. Science might be defined as the art of the impossible. The crisis which is upon us may not find its ultimate solution until the statesmen catch up with the scientists, and politics, too, becomes the art of the impossible. This, I believe, might be achieved when the statesmen will be more afraid of the atomic bomb than they are afraid of using their imagination, because imagination is the tool which has to be used if the impossible is to be accomplished."

Let us hope that in our search for the solution of the problem now before us in this Committee we may show both imagination and courage. As one step towards that solution, my Delegation has the honour to support the resolution which has been submitted in the name of France and Canada.

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