

No. 55/19

DISARMAMENT

Statement by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Paul Martin, made in the First Committee.

We are now engaged in the discussion of one of the most important issues on our agenda.

Other matters on the agenda affect the well-being of larger or smaller groups of persons. But when we are dealing with disarmament, particularly in the thermonuclear age, we are approaching a question which is of immediate and vital concern to all the countries and to all individuals.

In making our contribution in this discussion, we, for our part, will be mindful of the fact that the powers represented at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Geneva have been at pains to explain that negotiations, while temporarily interrupted, have not been broken off and that they are to be continued through other channels. We think, therefore, that everything we say here should be calculated, if at all possible, to improve the prospects of further discussions on disarmament and to increase the chances of ultimate agreement.

We must realize that there is an increasing element of urgency in the matter. We can no longer be indifferent whether we reach agreement now, or a year, or five years from now. A few years ago, it could have been argued that as long as there was no disarmament, we were the poorer for all the resources that could not be diverted from armaments to peaceful purposes. It could also be argued that armaments, while not originally so much the cause as the result or the symbol of tension, tended in turn to contribute themselves to increasing the atmosphere of suspicion and to become on their own an element of tension. All these considerations remain valid today but now there is an additional reason for urgent action as the stock of nuclear material increases and becomes more widely distributed. In view of the ineffectiveness of presently known methods of control in this field, the prospects of a satisfactory settlement may be increasingly impaired through the passage of time. This is a sobering thought and one which should induce us in all earnestness to grasp all possible means of promoting agreement as soon as possible.

We all recall with what feelings of hope we welcomed the decision last year on the part of the Soviet Union to agree to a resumption of private negotiations in the Disarmament Commission's Sub-Committee. The decision was ratified unanimously by the Assembly just about a year ago. This note of harmony inaugurated, we believed at that time, a new era of greater co-operation which justified the expectation that, in time, humanity might be free from the nightmare of atomic warfare.

The private discussions in the Sub-Committee started in London on February 25th and lasted until May 18, 1955.

On March 8th, the Western powers introduced the Anglo-French proposals in the form of a draft resolution. The resolution called for the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons except in defence against aggression. It also called for the negotiation of a disarmament treaty which would involve, in accordance with prior United Nations resolutions, the total prohibition of the use and manufacture of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction of every type, together with the conversion of existing stocks of nuclear weapons for peaceful purposes; the resolution called for major reductions in all armed forces and conventional armaments as well as for the establishment of a control organ with rights, powers and functions adequate to guarantee the effective observance of the agreed prohibitions and reductions. I feel that in discussing this matter we should recall the history of the problem in the last twelve months so that we will have a proper perspective as we are confronted with it.

The program was to be completed in three stages. Initially, armed forces and military expenditures, both atomic and non-atomic, were to be frozen at levels of December 31, 1954 or such other date as might be agreed on at a proposed world disarmament conference. Then one half of the reductions foreseen for conventional armaments and armed forces would be effected. Once these reductions had been completed, the manufacture of nuclear weapons was to cease. In the last stage, the second half of the agreed reductions of conventional armaments and armed forces would be carried out and the total prohibition of nuclear weapons would go into force.

Within each stage, the measures envisaged were only to take place when the control organ reported that it was able effectively to enforce them.

This was the original position of the Western delegations. I have outlined it in some detail because this position was to provide the basis for further discussions and negotiations. It will be noted in particular that these Western proposals envisaged a comprehensive disarmament programme on the understanding that a control organ would effectively guarantee its implementation. This basic Western position remains unaltered to this day.

In the course of the discussions, the United Kingdom and the French Delegations made additional proposals. They suggested that the forces of the Great Powers should be reduced to specified levels and that the complete prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons should go into force upon the completion of the third quarter (i.e., 75 per cent) of the reduction of conventional armaments and armed forces. This concession was made contingent upon agreement being reached, among other things, on the institution of an effective system of control, which would operate throughout the whole disarmament programme. As will be noted, the condition of effective control is essential to Western proposals. One can't underline that too strongly. Any proposals advanced by the West have extended to but not beyond the limits allowed by the possibilities of effective control.

On May 10 the Soviet Delegation tabled a 22-page document dealing with disarmament and "the elimination of the threat of a new war". These proposals imposed a rigid timetable whereby the whole disarmament programme would be fully implemented by the end of 1957; they embodied the Anglo-French proposals on phasing and on the level of armed forces but they do not meet adequately the essentially related condition regarding control. Furthermore, the Soviet proposals agreed with the Western suggestion that nuclear weapons should not be used except in defence against aggression but specify that the use of these weapons should be permitted "when a decision to this effect is taken by the Security Council". These Soviet proposals represented an advance on earlier positions but they were not clear on the essential question of an effective control system. The Soviet plan also contained a number of new features calling, for instance, for the dismantling of all military bases in foreign territories, the immediate withdrawal of occupation troops from Germany, the condemnation of war propaganda, the removal of every form of discrimination in the field of trade, etc.

As some of the Soviet proposals went beyond the terms of reference of the Sub-committee and in view of the forthcoming discussions of the Four Powers at Geneva, the meetings of the Sub-committee were adjourned on May 18.

At the Geneva Conference, (the one held last July) disarmament was one of the main topics of discussion; it will be recalled that one of the most spectacular developments at that meeting was President Eisenhower's suggestion that the United States and the U.S.S.R. should give each other a complete blueprint of their military establishments from one end of their countries to the other and that each country should provide unlimited facilities for aerial photography of its territory by the other country. As President Eisenhower said: "We, to provide you with the facilities within our country, ample facilities, for aerial reconnaissance where you can make all the pictures you choose and take them to your own country to study; you, to provide exactly the same facilities for us and we to make these examinations".

With this suggestion, the discussions on disarmament were to take a new turn. In presenting his proposals, the President was elaborating on the suggestion contained in his opening statement that the future discussions on the vital issue of inspection might be oriented towards the establishment of "an alarm system". The new approach was prompted by the consideration which is recognized by the Soviet Government that the most thorough system of inspection might provide for adequate control of future atomic and non-atomic activities from the time of its establishment but it could not in the present state of scientific knowledge ensure the complete identification and elimination of stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The President confirmed this development specifically in his July 21 speech when he said: "We have not yet been able to discover any scientific or other inspection method which would make certain the elimination of nuclear weapons. So far as we are aware, no other nation has made such a discovery. Our study of this problem is continuing". The reports of the Sub-Committee, particularly of the meetings that began on August 29, revealed continued acknowledgement of this fact.

The Prime Minister of France introduced the suggestion that some of the savings resulting from disarmament measures could be used through an international economic organization to carry out a world-wide programme of assistance to under-developed countries. He envisaged that financial and budgetary controls could be provided in the general systems of control which had been planned as part of a disarmament programme.

In addition to the new proposals by the United States and France, a third Western proposal, introduced at Geneva by Prime Minister Eden, was intended as a practical experiment, particularly in the field of control and inspection.

The Soviet Union added little in Geneva to its proposals of May 10 submitted in the Disarmament Sub-committee. The Soviet Prime Minister reiterated at first his Government's suggestion for the withdrawal of foreign troops, the settlement of Far Eastern issues and the normalization of trade relations. Most of the proposals contained in the Soviet plan of May 10 were confirmed in Geneva either in Mr. Bulganin's opening statement or in the Disarmament Paper which he tabled on July 21.

These various proposals were received in the general atmosphere of confidence and optimism which had been generated by the meeting and it was a matter of great satisfaction to my Government, and I am sure to all of us, that there should have been unanimous agreement on the continuation of the Disarmament Sub-committee discussions on August 29 in New York. It is true that in Geneva, in spite of the friendliness of the discussions and the sincerity of those who had made proposals, there had been no real narrowing of the gap between the Western and the Soviet position. The Soviet Government did not clarify their position on the question of control and they did not then react to President Eisenhower's suggestion of a new approach to the problem.

The Sub-committee reconvened in New York on August 29 in accordance with the agreement reached at the Big Four Conference where it had been agreed that the representatives on the Sub-committee should "take into account in their work the views and the proposals advanced by the Heads of Government at this conference".

The Sub-committee discussions were not, frankly as fruitful as we had hoped. Attempts were made in the course of these discussions to seek clarification on a number of points and in particular on the essential question of control. As on previous occasions the Soviet representative failed to provide the required clarification of their May 10 proposals. I should like to digress here: I believe that in these matters of delicate negotiation, temper and manner mean a great deal. While I cannot feel very happy with the position taken by the Soviet Union, I cannot commend too highly the manner of Mr. Sobolev as a member of the Sub-Committee.

In the course of the meetings it emerged that given the scientific facts of the situation, while a comprehensive system of disarmament extending to nuclear weapons remained the goal there were immediate difficulties in plans calling for their elimination. The Sub-committee discussions pointed

to the desirability of establishing a warning system which it seemed would create greater confidence and would in any case not prejudice future action if a scientific breakthrough could be achieved. The way would then be open for the establishment of a fully comprehensive disarmament programme as had been envisaged originally.

While the meetings were underway Mr. Bulganin, in a letter to President Eisenhower presented in Washington on September 20, indicated his acceptance of certain elements of the Eisenhower proposals but in view of the approaching meetings of the Foreign Ministers in Geneva, the Subcommittee again had to discontinue its work.

As was indicated the other day in the Disarmament Commission, we were disappointed at the lack of progress in Geneva. The failure on the part of the Foreign Ministers to reach agreement on the major political issues was bound to make it more difficult to advance in the field of disarmament and it was soon evident that even on the latter problem no progress would be possible.

It is significant that in the course of the Geneva meeting the other two Western Foreign Ministers, without abandoning their objective of a comprehensive disarmament programme extending to all kinds of weapons, concurred in the suggestion that there might be put into operation a plan to help prevent a surprise attack along the lines envisaged by President Eisenhower. It will be recalled that the Canadian Government expressed early in September its strong approval in principle of the Eisenhower plan, we feel that this was a plan that was bold and imaginative; coming as it did from this particular source, it was capable of giving us and the world the kind of confidence and trust which we need so much at this time.

I have studied carefully Mr. Kuznetsov's last statement. The essential point he makes is one we ourselves have emphasized all along: to achieve progress in the field of disarmament, it is necessary to increase confidence. In order to increase confidence and to reduce international tension, an advance must be made along a broad front, dealing with the related political, economic and military problems which divide the opposing groups.

We agree that confidence is of the essence and that disarmament is linked with the major political issues facing us.

Yet, at Geneva, where the Western Powers made an effort to resolve the main outstanding political problems, we know what was the Soviet reaction and contribution. The record speaks for itself. Both on the question of German re-unification and on that of European security, the Soviet Union took the most intransigent and negative attitude. Such a policy was bound to prejudice any settlement with the consequences which can be foreseen as to the decrease of confidence and the prospects of progress in the field of disarmament.

Concerning disarmament, the Soviet Union contends that it has accepted the three major elements of the programmes recommended by the General Assembly: the elimination of nuclear weapons, reduction of armed forces and armaments, effective inspection and control.

By the Soviet Government's own admission in their May 10th proposals we know that the elimination of nuclear weapons cannot now be enforced. And, in his latest speech, Mr. Kuznetsov has not denied this. He has confidence in the progress of scientific research. So have we. Our draft resolution records our hopes on this point. But, until a solution has been found to the problem of control, we are not prepared to continue to seek a solution but we are most certainly not prepared to accept commitments which would be suicidal in the absence of safeguards which have yet to be devised.

The Western proposals on the levels of forces were explicitly related to the third element of the programme, effective inspection and control. On this point, the record is again illuminating. Never, and I emphasize the word never, have the Soviet representatives been prepared to explain exactly what they mean when they refer to inspection and control. Never have they given any indication that such schemes as they would be prepared to accept would be really effective and would warrant the confidence which alone makes it possible to achieve progress in this field. I am sure that we can make no progress in this matter until this fact is recognized.

Therefore, of the three elements in the United Nations programme, the U.S.S.R. have accepted one - that is, atomic prohibition - which on their own admission cannot at present be carried out. They have refused to go beyond unacceptable generalities about the third - that is, control - and they try to make much of their acceptance of the second, levels of forces, which, as we know, is related to the first objective and also to the third and was subject to conditions which the U.S.S.R. continues to disregard.

As we have maintained all along, peace can be assured through effective disarmament. Effective disarmament means adequate inspection and control. The Soviet reluctance on this point is ominous. It raises doubts whether effective inspection and control would not involve difficulties for the Soviet leaders because of their implications insofar as the Soviet system is concerned. It may be that an effective fool-proof disarmament scheme of the kind which the West wants, that is of the kind that will effectively give security to all, can only be had if the Soviet leaders are prepared to relax their monopoly over the minds of the peoples they control.

Such are, in broad terms, the result of difficult and intense negotiations on the subject of disarmament since the matter was last discussed in this Committee. As I see it, until the Summit Meeting, there had been a small but significant narrowing of the gap between the positions of the two opposing camps. Previous unacceptable propaganda proposals such as the immediate banning of the bomb had been abandoned and it seemed that, if agreement could have been reached over the details concerning levels of forces and inspection, at least the general framework of a practical scheme of disarmament could have been available. Particularly at the meetings of the Sub-Committee it had been possible to really come to grips with the core of the problem.

At the Summit Meeting, the world was confronted with a series of imaginative and constructive plans, approaching the problems of disarmament from a variety of angles admittedly, but as has been stressed by the representative of France, not in a mutually incompatible fashion. This array of new ideas may have distracted attention, however, from the formidable and so far unsolved difficulties as regards the possibility of effectively controlling the prohibition of nuclear weapons. It seems to me that since that important Summit Meeting, all discussions directly or indirectly have been dominated by this new factor and by attempts to develop formulae which would take account of its implications.

In view of the current, and I trust, temporary scientific difficulties which I have just mentioned, our position in regard to disarmament, given the proposals which have been submitted so far, can be summarized in three clear and simple propositions.

My first proposition is that because it cannot be effectively controlled, the elimination of nuclear weapons cannot at this time be part of a programme of disarmament to be implemented immediately. True, all of us retain the hope that soon it may be possible to devise means whereby control will be possible. In the meantime it is not realistic nor helpful to suggest, as is done in the latest Soviet proposals tabled in Geneva, that "effective international control shall be established over the implementation of measures for ... the prohibition of atomic weapons". The plain truth is that at the present time a complete prohibition of atomic weapons cannot be effectively controlled. And no one has stated this more clearly than the Soviet Government in its May 10th proposals. Surely, all efforts will continue to be made, as suggested by the Western Powers in Geneva, to search for a solution to this problem.

I wish to stress at this point that the policy of my government on prohibition of nuclear weapons has not changed. Now as in the past we support the prohibition of nuclear weapons as part of a general disarmament scheme provided adequate control is both scientifically and technically feasible and accepted by all parties concerned. We must come back again and again to the question of control. As long as the solution is not available the only honest and practical position that it is possible to take is to acknowledge the fact and recognize the limitations it involves. To agree to a complete but unverifiable prohibition now would be to accept a gamble with national security which no responsible government could take. We are not asking the U.S.S.R. to accept such a risk, and, in the present state of international relations, little purpose is gained and much may be lost in attempting to exploit for any purpose (I have got 'propaganda purposes' written in my text, but I am leaving that out) the refusal on the part of any country to jeopardize its security by taking such a gamble.

My second proposition is that, if the bomb cannot effectively be banned now and the major political issues resolved, this does not mean that we should fold our arms and do nothing or that we should necessarily restrict ourselves to the setting up of an alarm system or to experimentation with pilot schemes. It is agreed by all concerned that a broad area in the field of conventional

armaments could be effectively controlled. Furthermore, it is also agreed that future production of nuclear material can be subjected to extensive checks. The normal means of delivery, such as long-range planes, would naturally be covered by the plans for reduction of conventional armaments.

I might add, parenthetically, that the new and more effective instruments, such as the I.B.M. which could be used to launch a sudden nuclear attack, are also susceptible to a degree of control directly or indirectly.

Scientific developments now enable us to foresee with reasonable certainty the advent of a completely new weapons system for intercontinental warfare. The major nations of the world are devoting an increasing proportion of their research and development effort to perfecting this means for the delivery of atomic and thermonuclear weapons almost instantaneously to any part of the world. Scientists consider defence against these weapons to be possible but this would require a tremendous effort extending over many years.

Thus, the impending perfection of these new weapons of offence and the need for a completely new kind of defence against them faces all the nations of the world with the grim prospect of an arms race on a scale even vaster than those of the present. This race is only well begun and nations have not yet embarked on the enormous expenditures that would be required to produce these new weapons of offence and defence when they become available.

The experience of centuries has shown that, even if it were desirable, it would be useless to try to prevent the advance of science by national law or international agreement. Therefore, scientists will inevitably pursue the development of rockets capable of intercontinental flight, of earth satellites and even of inter-planetary rockets.

These frightening possibilities make it even more imperative that we agree soon on as comprehensive a disarmament programme, as is feasible, one which would encompass the I.B.M.

Everyone, including I think the U.S.S.R., now regrets that it was not possible to control the development of atomic weapons at an earlier time in their evolution when control was still possible. Surely we should learn something from the bitter experience of the past few years and seek now to control the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles before it is too late.

Without departing, therefore, from the essential principle of effective control, it should be possible within a relatively short time to develop agreement on a large and truly significant programme of disarmament. If this were done we would be left with the problem of nuclear weapons. I admit that it is a serious one; it would have implications, for instance, for the level of forces which should be retained and on the types of armaments which should be allowed. The point which I wish to emphasize is that right now we could develop a measure of disarmament which would substantially alter the international situation. The psychological climate, and the budgetary situation in our

various countries, would be greatly affected if we were to achieve the degree of confidence which would enable us to effect even part of the programme of disarmament which is now technically within our reach.

Because we cannot have all the disarmament that is theoretically conceivable, should we not have now at least that large measure of the disarmament which is feasible now and which would be so helpful to the world politically and economically? It would not even be necessary to proceed with all the disarmament which would be technically enforceable now to achieve the most far-reaching transformation of international scene. In this case it can truly be said that we should not allow "le mieux d'être l'ennemi du bien".

My third proposition relates to the establishment of warning systems against the danger of a sudden attack. The U.S.S.R. recognizes this danger and this requirement. Mr. Bulganin's proposals of July 21 last provide for the establishment of control posts, for instance. The difficulty is that the Soviet Government does not agree as to the timing of the introduction of such a system. While we envisage the organization of an alarm system as a prelude to a disarmament programme, the U.S.S.R. insist that such an arrangement should be part of a broad disarmament scheme. That is not the original position that it took.

If we were agreed that a comprehensive disarmament programme which could effectively be controlled were to be implemented, it seems to be that it should not prove to be too difficult to specify in the agreement the nature of the machinery which would be required to give adequate warning against sudden attack and the proper time to introduce it in a generally acceptable scheme.

We fully agree with the U.S. Government that Soviet acceptance of the Eisenhower proposal would have contributed to a lessening of tension, that it would have increased confidence and made further progress easier in the field of disarmament. We still hope as suggested in our draft resolution that the U.S.S.R. will appreciate the advantages offered by the Eisenhower plan and that it will not turn down the opportunity of doing now what will have to be done later, in any case, as part of the comprehensive programme it recommends. If the U.S.S.R. is not prepared to agree, it does not follow necessarily, in our opinion, that a limited but effective agreement on disarmament could not be negotiated and that such an agreement cannot provide at the appropriate moment and in the appropriate fashion for an early-warning system as envisaged by the U.S. In the absence of a general political settlement, however, we must recognize that the task is more difficult and that confidence building measures such as the Eisenhower plan would facilitate the initial and most difficult steps on the way to disarmament and by the same token create a more favourable atmosphere for the settlement of political issues.

In spite of the temporary disarray caused by the disconcerting scientific limitations in our capabilities of control, it appears to us that in the field of disarmament the scope of negotiation and early action is considerable. Within the inescapable and recognized political and technical limitations it remains open to us to develop the kind of agreement which would achieve some of the essential purposes

we have been seeking all along in the field of disarmament. In this, as in so many other matters, we should not be perfectionists. As long as our security would be significantly increased, even if it is not completely ensured, we should take in this field the steps which we are fully capable of taking now and which may yet facilitate the solution of other problems which have directly contributed to the international tension.

My three propositions boil down to this. All parties must and do recognize the facts of life on nuclear prohibition at the present time. But let us nevertheless proceed with as large and significant a measure of disarmament as is now possible as well as with effective arrangements for early warning against surprise attack. At the same time our scientists will be doing their utmost to provide the answers on total nuclear prohibition which remains our policy and our goal.

Given their intricate character and their connection with political issues, it is evident to me that, if any progress is to be achieved, the disarmament problems must be discussed under the most favourable conditions. From that point of view the Assembly may consider as we suggest in the draft resolution that the Sub-committee may remain of value as a negotiating instrument. Whenever necessary its discussions should assume a confidential character which is clearly conducive to better results. Further, the Committee has already explored the field and prepared the ground. Therefore, if only the will to advance were there, it would be possible in the Sub-Committee with the available material to continue the work already undertaken and to develop the kind of plan which I am convinced could be carried out effectively.

The world will not be concerned whether success is achieved through this or that approach nor will it understand delays because of preoccupation with details of timing or authorship. Once it is satisfied that a workable solution is possible, public opinion in all countries will insist that all other considerations should be subordinated to the imperative necessity of arriving at an answer and that no other objections except those relating genuinely to the practicability or effectiveness of the plan will be entertained.

In order to succeed we are not required to perform a miracle, to arrange for the intervention of a genius. All that is needed of us is the exercise of normal moderation, the willingness to behave sensibly, having in mind the common interest. I refuse to believe that under such circumstances we will not reach our objective, assured peace through collective and controlled, if temporarily limited, disarmament. Under no circumstances do we abandon our main objective. We still believe the time is at hand for a resolution of this difficult problem.

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