



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

STATEMENT ON ATOMIC ENERGY

An address by the Hon. Lionel Chevrier,
Acting Head of the Canadian Delegation
to the Third Session of the General
Assembly of the United Nations, at Paris,
in the First Committee on October 18,
1948.

The report of the sub-committee on atomic energy indicates that eight of the eleven members of that sub-committee gave their support to a resolution on atomic energy, the text of which is now before you in Document A/C.1/333. This draft resolution carries forward the substance of the original Canadian resolution on atomic energy, which was submitted to this Committee on September 30th and it includes likewise the intent of the New Zealand resolution which I accepted for inclusion at our meeting on October 7th. The Canadian delegation regards this new form of its resolution as a marked improvement on the first drafts, and we are grateful for the opportunity which we have had for discussion in sub-committee. We are grateful also for the intelligent and useful contributions which other delegations have made towards its improvement, and particularly to France, Sweden, Ecuador and the United States. It now stands, Mr. Chairman, in the name of the eight delegations which supported it in the sub-committee. These are Brazil, Canada, China, Ecuador, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. My colleague from Ecuador expressed in sub-committee reservations concerning one paragraph, but these reservations did not prevent him from giving his generous support to the resolution as a whole.

In its criticism of the majority resolution, and of the approach to the problem of atomic energy which is embodied in it, the USSR continually misrepresents this resolution by failing to take account of its positive character. They say that the majority resolution closes the door to further progress towards the international control of atomic energy and the prohibition of atomic weapons. This description of the majority resolution is false. It will remain false no matter how many times it is repeated and no matter how violently this view may be expressed by the representative of the Soviet Union. The truth is that the majority resolution contains an affirmation of a workable and practical procedure by which the world can rid itself of the menace of atomic warfare and gain for itself freedom to reap the full benefits of atomic energy in its many and varied applications in the peaceful arts and sciences. It is of the utmost importance that delegations here should realize these facts clearly and precisely. The existence of grave dangers on the one hand and of important benefits on the other should not be blurred by the repetition, couched in elusive language, by the USSR of their proposals. These proposals have been considered time and again, and have been given a most careful, painstaking and time-consuming analysis. They have always been found to be receptive and to offer no real basis of agreement. It is the majority proposal alone which holds out to the world a real chance to free for peaceful uses the development of atomic energy on a co-operative basis and which offers a real hope that atomic warfare may be eliminated and the people of the world safeguarded against this dreadful possibility. In the firm and confident belief that this assertion is true, and that it will be judged true in history, the Canadian delegation supports the majority resolution.

The first general statement made in this resolution is an affirmation of support for the principles which have been defined in the majority reports of the Atomic Energy Commission for the control of atomic energy and the prohibition of atomic weapons. When the Atomic Energy Commission began its work, no one knew whether or not it would be possible even for two states to agree upon principles for this purpose. After the most careful and expert process of consideration, to which fourteen states have given their concurrence, it has been found that an international system for control and development of atomic energy and the elimination of atomic warfare is indeed possible. Only those individuals who have taken part in the long and difficult task of working out this plan fully realize how great an achievement in human co-operation this represents. Everyone knows that the plan is of necessity complicated. Everyone also knows that it will involve considerations of national sovereignty, and that activities heretofore regarded as being within the national sphere will in future have to be exercised through international association. It is most surprising to hear this project for the co-operative international development of one of the world's great potential resources being attacked, in the interests of safeguarding the private rights of one nation, by a state such as the USSR which claims to be inspired by principles of action for the general good.

In place of the majority resolution, the representative of the USSR proposes a programme of specious and deceptive simplicity. The Soviet resolution calls for the signing of simultaneous conventions prohibiting atomic warfare and establishing international control of atomic energy. What the USSR fails to state is that the process of producing the materials which release atomic energy is practically complete before the first step is taken towards assembling an atomic bomb. What they are asking us to do is to start by controlling the last simple detail of the process, before they have given us any adequate assurance that they will co-operate with us in controlling the earlier essential steps. On the contrary, through the long debates which have taken place in the Atomic Energy Commission, in which every effort has been made to secure their assurances on this point, they have demonstrated clearly time and again that they have no present intention of co-operating in any reasonable plan for controlling the production, refining, and further processing of uranium and thorium, without which the control of its assembly into a bomb is without meaning. This is the deception that lies in the Soviet resolution. It is a deception which, as I have said, is repeated and reiterated time after time and which must be denied every time it is put forward. Let me say again, Mr. Chairman, that it is only by co-operating fully in the control of the production of uranium and thorium and of their processing from the time these substances are taken from the ground to the time that they are used up by the release of their energy for peaceful purposes that the USSR can really contribute to the solution of this problem. The facts of atomic energy are such that nothing short of a complete solution is any solution at all. The only answer lies in a co-operative association which is universal, and which the work of the Atomic Energy Commission has shown to be technically feasible and possible.

The Canadian delegation has been reassured by the clear perception shown in this Committee of the basic truth that I have just asserted. The principles which underlie this truth have been enunciated in the first two reports of the Atomic Energy Commission. They are affirmed in the first part of the resolution that is before us. The only two delegations which have dissented from them in the meetings of the sub-committee were the USSR and the Soviet Ukraine. Many other delegations in our earlier debate, before the sub-committee was appointed, have indicated their clear understanding of these principles and their support for them. In this connection, I was particularly impressed with the precise, lucid, and forceful statement in which Colonel Hodgson my Australian colleague, made clear on October 6 the support of the Australian Government for the principles to which I have referred. The Canadian delegation, Mr. Chairman, is glad that an opportunity is now given to an even greater number of states to show their support for these principles, which are stated in the first part of this resolution. In

doing so, they will make clear the line of progress by which the world may yet move forward towards the control and development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes only and the prohibition of atomic warfare.

The second way in which the majority resolution before us is positive is in its reference to the reasons for the deadlock which has occurred in the activities of the Atomic Energy Commission. The third report of the Atomic Energy Commission contains an analysis of the present situation in the work of that body. This analysis makes clear beyond question of doubt why it is not possible to make progress until agreement has been reached on the principles which have already been enunciated.

It is idle for the delegation of the Soviet Union to come to this Assembly with a specious offer to accept the international control of atomic energy when they have repeatedly in the meetings of the Atomic Energy Commission refused to accept the only basis on which it will be possible to work out that control and make it effective. This point is made clear in the third report of the Atomic Energy Commission. The Canadian delegation is glad, Mr. Chairman, that it has been possible to include in the majority resolution a reference to this report, so that it may be specially drawn to the attention of the nations of the world. It is most important that the Assembly should accept this provision so that it may show clearly the way that leads to progress.

I come finally to the third part of the majority resolution which deals with the future activity of the Atomic Energy Commission. Here again the resolution is positive, and points the way to future progress. I know that some delegations have misgivings on this subject. These misgivings have found expression in the resolutions presented by the representatives of Australia, Syria and India, and in the statements of some other delegates. Let me say that this point of view was admirably and clearly represented in the sub-committee by the delegate from India. It was also supported, with uncertain logic and for motives of their own, by the delegates of the USSR and the Ukraine.

The proposal that is made in the Indian resolution is that the Atomic Energy Commission should be instructed to continue its work in spite of the fact that the USSR has refused to give its agreement to the principles which must be accepted before the work can go forward. I fully realize that this proposal has been put forward as an attempt at conciliation between those who support the New Zealand position as it has now been incorporated in this resolution and the contention of the USSR that, in some vague way, agreement may yet be reached in the Atomic Energy Commission in spite of the intransigence which that government regularly has shown as regards the discussions of the Commission. I am sure, however, that it is more expedient to seek reconciliation in a body which can deal with the basic political issue which divides the USSR from the rest of us. For this task, technicians and the experts who serve on the Atomic Energy Commission are not appropriate authorities. It is the political leaders such as those who originally sponsored the setting up of the Commission, who alone can solve this issue. Until that political issue has been cleared out of the way, there is no point in proceeding, by majority decisions in the Atomic Energy Commission, with the technical aspects of the work in spite of the objections of the USSR. It is our earnest and serious belief that to force the Atomic Energy Commission to continue its sessions in present circumstances is not the path of progress. There is no use attempting to continue a journey if the travellers in the vehicle are not agreed as to which road they shall take. That is, before we can go further, we must have agreement on political principles. This is intended to be brought about by the majority resolution. The Atomic Energy Commission is to be kept in being; it is to meet immediately when the six sponsoring powers find that they are in agreement about the next stage of the journey. In the meantime, the efficient and able secretariat of the Commission will continue to

collect, collate and publish the information on this continuously developing subject, which will be necessary when discussions are resumed. This staff must also give preliminary study to the topics which the Commission has already decided must be taken up in detail. This is a sensible, a positive, a constructive proposal. In the long run it will get us further in our journey than immediate attempts to hold meetings when there is no common ground for discussion. Let us not be fooled, Mr. Chairman, by propaganda assertions from the USSR, which has never contributed to any of the progress made thus far in the Atomic Energy Commission, that we are closing doors; to the contrary, we are leaving them open. I cannot assert too firmly the willingness of the Canadian Government to go forward with its commitment the moment there is any possibility that the obligations which must be accepted by all if the control of atomic energy and the prohibition of atomic weapons are to be accomplished, have some chance of general and equal acceptance.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, what will be the result of the adoption of the majority resolution? It may not bring into effect tomorrow or the next day the control and prohibition which we all so greatly desire. But it will make clear to the world the agreement which has been reached on the principles which must underlie further progress. It will make clear to the world also the basis upon which the knowledge, the skill, the raw materials and equipment of mankind in the field of atomic energy can be co-ordinated and made available for the good of all. No one is under any illusions about the danger which hangs over the world, and the majority resolution holds out no false hopes, however plausible, that safety can be found today or tomorrow in some form of words. It does, however, hold out a real hope that, by putting their minds and wills together on the basis of these principles the nations of the world may yet banish atomic war and co-operate in the development of a great new physical resource, atomic energy.

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