

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 48/52

CANADA AND THE REPORT OF THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

A speech delivered by Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, Canadian Permanent Delegate to the United Nations, in the First Committee of the Third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in Paris, on September 30, 1948.

The matter of the consideration of atomic energy comes before the General Assembly of the United Nations and before this Committee in consequence of a resolution which I had the privilege of presenting to the Security Council on 22 June 1948. This resolution provides merely for the transmission of the three reports of the Atomic Energy Commission, but it goes on to say that these matters are a subject of very special concern.

This resolution of transmittal followed the exercise of the veto by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics against the proposal which had been presented previously by the United States of America on behalf of a number of members who had joined with them in preparing a resolution endorsing the majority report to which the resolution refers.

I think it is very important for this Committee to understand why the majority of members of the Atomic Energy Commission were so anxious to have the case come on to the General Assembly, and I do not believe that I can do better than to quote the remarks which I myself made in the Security Council following the exercise of the veto against the United States resolution and in proposing the resolution which was in fact adopted by the Council. I then said:

"The veto which has just been imposed by the representative of the Soviet Union has the effect of preventing the Security Council from taking a decision on the reports of the Atomic Energy Commission. This vitally important matter obviously cannot be left to rest there. It is essential, as I have already stated in this Council, that the General Assembly, which established the Commission and defined its responsibilities, should be fully apprised of the work which has been done by the Commission. The General Assembly should also be informed of the situation in which the Commission now finds itself and, as stated in the third report, this situation arises principally from conditions with which the Commission is not competent to deal.

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"The General Assembly and the members of the United Nations should also be informed of the deliberations which have taken place in the Security Council with regard to atomic energy. They should have an opportunity of studying for themselves the proposals which have been put forward for the international control of atomic energy so that they may review, and so that the General Assembly may judge, the attitudes taken in regard to these proposals by each member of the Atomic Energy Commission.

"Those of us who have worked out in good faith the proposals which are contained in the majority report will thus be enabled to test our conclusions in the wider forum of the General Assembly and, despite a natural disappointment with the remarks which have just been made by the representatives of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR, I still hope that, given time between now and the meeting of the General Assembly for further reflection on the essentials of the problem, they will come to appreciate the sincerity and the convictions of those who framed the majority proposals, and that they will come also to recognise that their conclusions are inescapable. Thus, in the General Assembly we shall endeavour to find a basis on which the work of the Atomic Energy Commission may be resumed and which will ultimately lead to agreement on this matter which, I think, everyone is convinced is essential for the continued peace and well-being of the world".

The three reports of the Atomic Energy Commission are before the General Assembly and have been referred to this Committee.

I should like first to say a word about the significance of atomic energy as a weapon for war. It will be recalled that three years ago two atomic bombs fell upon Japan. More than 115,000 people were killed and another 110,000 injured. These two bombs were delivered by two aircraft with small crews, packed an explosive concentration equal to over 40,000 tons of TNT, which is a concentration of energy which a short time before would have required for delivery at the target at least 10,000 aircraft and perhaps a crew of 100,000. Thus, by the introduction of the atomic bomb, even in its elementary model, the power of the greatest individual weapon previously available was multiplied by a factor of several thousands; and tremendous as was this achievement, and terrifying as was the result, it is well to remember that under the conditions then existing only a relatively small part of the nuclear energy present in the active material of the bomb was released in the explosion.

In the intervening years these atomic weapons in a number of new forms have been the subject of intensive research made possible by large resources and carried forward by persons who had previously become skilled in the art. It is known that as a consequence the efficiency of the explosion can be very substantially improved, and it may well be that the possibilities in this connection may be represented by a shift of the decimal point.

Also, as regards materials it is well known that new sources have become available. It is not too much to say, therefore, that the United Nations in seeking methods and means of controlling atomic energy is dealing with something which, if it is not controlled and if it should be used, may well bring an end to civilization as we know it. And for the first time in the history of the world the means for the utter destruction of a current civilization are present.

It was with a deep realization of the application of atomic energy to war as well as of the peaceful economic possibilities, that scientists and military men and statesmen, even before Hiroshima, started thinking of this problem which had been created and which can only be solved in terms of international agreement.

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The first step towards the creation of such international agreement was made very shortly after the termination of the war by the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada in a declaration which was issued at Washington, D.C. on 15 November 1945. Recognizing the need for an international agreement, these countries proposed as a matter of great urgency the setting up of a Commission under the United Nations to study the problem and to make appropriate recommendations for its control. This declaration was followed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, the United States and the U.S.S.R., which was held in Moscow in December 1945 and at which the Washington proposals were fully endorsed. These three Governments then invited France, China and Canada to join with them in sponsoring proposals at the General Assembly.

At the meeting of the General Assembly held on 24 January 1946 in London the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was established by unanimous resolution. I should like to recall to this Committee that the Atomic Energy Commission is composed of delegations from each of the eleven countries represented on the Security Council, as well as Canada when Canada was not a member of the Security Council. It was charged with making specific proposals. Among other matters to be included are proposals "for the control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes" and "for effective safeguards by way of inspection and other means to protect complying states against the hazards of violations and evasions".

When the Commission first met in New York in June 1946 it was presented with two different plans for the control of atomic energy. One was proposed by the United States and the other by the U.S.S.R.

The plan which was the result of the work of the Commission has been submitted to the General Assembly and carries the endorsement of nine out of eleven present members of the Commission. It is based on the proposals originally put forward by the United States. In brief, this plan is a great project for international collaboration on a scale far exceeding anything previously attempted.

It calls for the formation of an international atomic energy authority which would own all uranium and thorium in trust for the nations of the world from the time these substances are taken from the ground, and which would control the mining of all such ores. Production would be strictly related to consumption, and there would be no accumulation of stocks to cause anxiety. The authority would own, operate and manage all facilities handling dangerous amounts of these fissionable materials, and thus would control directly all the atomic energy activities in all nations which might become a potential menace to world security.

A licensing and inspection system is contemplated for activities of a less serious character, and it is provided that the authority would foster beneficial uses and research in nationally owned establishments which would be limited, of course, to non-dangerous quantities. It is proposed that this system of control should be set up by stages, and after it is fully in operation the manufacture of bombs would cease and existing stocks would be disposed of and the explosive material reclaimed for peaceful use. The authority would then be given all available information from all sources regarding the production of atomic energy and similar related matters.

In contrast with these proposals which carry the majority support, the USSR representatives have proposed a plan which differs fundamentally. They envisage the immediate outlawing of the atomic bomb and the destruction of all existing stocks of weapons within a three months period, and to this end the representative of the USSR has tabled a draft

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convention which he has said should be negotiated forthwith as the first step towards the establishment of international control. The representative of the USSR has refused to even pledge his country to any second step in the development of control, and to us it seems that the idea that the menace to world peace which is presented by the atomic bomb could be dispelled by the mere signing of an agreement to prohibit its use is very unreal indeed. Certainly, the experience of the last twenty-five years has shown that international agreement alone are not sufficient to safeguard the peace. The prohibition by itself of the use and manufacture of the atomic bomb at the present time would not contribute to security -- it would merely most seriously reduce the military strength of the United States of America, which is the only nation now in possession of atomic bombs, at least on any scale which would suffice to make atomic war. It would be a measure of unilateral disarmament which would give no assurance that any country engaged in the production of atomic energy would or could not use the bomb in the future, because the fissionable material which is the essential substance for such peaceful applications as the development of atomic power is also the explosive element of the bomb, and in the absence of an effective system of control could readily be developed from a peaceful to a military use by a nation secretly preparing to wage atomic war.

For these reasons, most members of the Commission are in agreement that the prohibition of the use and manufacture of atomic bombs should form part of an over-all control plan so that when such prohibitions are put into effect they would be accompanied by the application of safeguards such as international inspection of all countries on a scale and with a thoroughness sufficient to ensure that no secret activities are in progress. The prohibition of atomic weapons standing by itself is little more than a pious hope; but prohibition as part of a comprehensive, thorough and effective system of control, starting with the international ownership of all fissionable materials in trust for the nations of the world, is something else again.

This seems so elementary that it has been very difficult to realize that the USSR is really serious in its simple prohibition convention. It was felt in the Commission that no doubt whatever must be left on this point, and so during this last year more than half the time and the attention of the members of the Commission has been devoted to a meticulous re-examination of the USSR proposals in detail, in order to make abundantly certain that no possible misconception of their purpose should stand in the way of agreement. However, it is now evident there is no misconception and there thus remains a wide gap between the views of the USSR now supported in this Commission by the Ukrainian SSR, and those of the remaining members of the Commission who have rejected the USSR proposals as "completely ignoring the existing technical knowledge or providing an adequate basis for effective control and the elimination of atomic weapons from national armaments".

In contrast to the USSR proposals, the plans which have been evolved by the majority are based on a strict acceptance of the scientific facts as to the very nature of atomic energy, and on the conclusions which follow logically from these facts. After more than 240 meetings, the Commission has decided that "No other solution will meet the facts, prevent national rivalries in this most dangerous field, and fulfil the Commission's terms of reference".

Such is the impasse which has developed in the Atomic Energy Commission, and such is the state of affairs which made it evident that the issue raised in the Commission should be taken to the General Assembly of the United Nations. In this Committee and in the meetings of the General Assembly at this session, it will be the hope that the majority proposals may

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be fully explained to the nations which previously have not had an opportunity to study these grave questions in detail. It will be the hope also that these proposals may be dealt with objectively, as their importance requires, and that the conclusions which are reached in the General Assembly will be based strictly on the merits of the case. The issues in question are far too grave and far too serious for the future of the world to permit them safely to be confused in discussion with other matters which have not had the benefit of the detailed, careful and meticulous preparation which the Atomic Energy Commission has given to the question of atomic energy.

It is vitally important that nothing should transpire which will obscure in any way the purpose and the scope and the full significance of the proposals which have been put in front of this Committee in the majority reports of the Atomic Energy Commission. The draft resolution which I have the honour to submit to you, and which has just been circulated, is designed to provide a suitable framework for discussion in this Committee with a view to bringing out in debate the full consideration of all the points which are at issue.

I would say that, since we only learned late yesterday evening that this matter would come before this Committee this morning, time has not permitted me to circulate this draft for prior consideration by those nations which have been associated with us in the majority report as, otherwise, I should have wished to have done. In consequence, I think this draft may, and probably will, require amendment. I can assure the Chairman and the members of the Committee that the Canadian Delegation will welcome any proposals that will improve it.

This draft resolution, in purport, is identical with the one which was proposed by the United States in the Security Council on 22 June, except that the references to various parts of the Commission's three reports by Chapter and Section have been expanded to include the text. This was done in order to meet the convenience of the members of the General Assembly and the general public. They may see, in one document, exactly what we are proposing that the General Assembly should study and approve.

In conclusion, I should like to say that atomic energy is not just another military weapon. The evidence shows clearly that the possibilities for the peaceful uses of this form of energy are literally incalculable. In medicine, in chemistry, in biology, in metallurgy, in engineering, tools of such novelty, power and aptness to the task in hand have been made available that, wherever they have been freed for use, the frontiers of knowledge are being pressed back and the vistas of human understanding are being widened in a most remarkable fashion. These are inspiring possibilities which intrigue the imagination, and we all look forward to the time when we will be able to facilitate this search for new knowledge by contributing the information and the help which we can make available.

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