

# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



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## THE INTERNATIONAL CONTROL OF ATOMIC ENERGY

Text of an address delivered by General A.G.L. McNaughton to the National Executive, United Nations Association in Canada, at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto on March 12, 1949.

I count it a very great privilege to have the opportunity to speak briefly to this gathering today because you who are here represent the central direction through which a great organization has been set up in Canada for the very important purpose of giving support to the United Nations. I am more particularly happy to speak to you today because it is one of the accepted responsibilities of your association to insure that what is happening at Lake Success and in United Nations activities elsewhere is known about and understood by the Public of Canada. For it is essential to provide a firm basis of a correctly and widely informed public opinion duly expressed so that we can support our national leaders in the Parliament and Government of our country and encourage all concerned to give that close and sympathetic attention to the United Nations which is requisite if the aspirations of the founders are to come to full fruition. I know of no cause which is more worth while nor of any which is more inspiring and indeed there can be no effort which is more hopeful -- and I use the word advisedly -- for the future welfare and happiness of the peoples of the world.

At this present day the United Nations has not yet complete its Third Session but already there is literally an amazing accomplishment to the credit of the organization. This is made up of the sum of the very significant advances which have been achieved in each of the component councils, commissions, committees, and specialized agencies. Everywhere you look -- in the groups dealing with economic and social questions; in the groups concerned with the problems of food and trade and transport, with labour and health, with refugees, with communications, with postal services, with education and scientific and cultural matters -- in everyone of these great categories of endeavour you find men and women from all over the world coming together, stating their problems without fear or favour, consulting with one another bringing their minds into agreement and hammering out solutions by the method of debate -- solutions which are then recommended to the nations of the world and, in many cases, promptly adopted.

In all these matters it is evident that accomplishment is on a rising curve and it seems that with each step forward the habit of agreement becomes somewhat less difficult. All of which sets a very inspiring example and stimulus to those of us who have to labour in the field of the political and security questions which today trouble the nations, principally by reason of the rift between East and West for which no bridge has yet been found and which therefore remains an ever-present difficulty and anxiety in every question which comes under consideration.

By reason of our representation at San Francisco and then at all the subsequent meetings of the Assembly, Canada has become aware at least in a general way of these security problems, many of which afflict the world. Always we have shown sympathy with those in distress, and often we have given friendly counsel and, on occasion, disinterested advice. But during the last year we have had to do much more than this because acceptance of membership in the Security Council has entailed not only the close and detailed study of every political and security problem which threatens peace throughout the world but we have undertaken the serious duty to contribute to the solution of these grave questions and to be responsible for any opinion and advice we may have had to offer.

Unfortunately the list of disputes which have come to the Council has been very long. It has ranged around the world from Berlin to Trieste and Greece and Palestine; to Kashmir and Indonesia and Korea and other places where angry men have stood in opposition with arms in their hands, -- where, on occasion, peace has broken down in acts of war, of riot and insurrection, of sabotage and murder, -- where, only with the greatest difficulty and by reason of the persistent and devoted endeavours of the servants of the United Nations on the spot has the conflict been kept in bounds and held from precipitating some general conflagration. Truly the world today is a very disturbed place.

We have heard much in the way of criticism of the United Nations for not preventing the outbreak of these disturbances. But they are the consequence of ancient national rivalries or of group ambitions or animosities of long standing, which have flared up anew. They are the troubles for which the United Nations was set up to find an answer, not the faults of the organization itself. In some circles also it has become a habit -- a very bad and unfortunate and unjustified habit I would say -- to impute the competency of the Security Council.

My answer to this is that despite the fact that the Security Council does not as yet dispose of any armed force for use as police, and could not therefore in any case compel obedience, but on the contrary it is restricted to the employment solely of the arts of persuasion, with its only weapon an informed world opinion -- I say that despite all these restrictions which many people might consider insuperable handicaps, nevertheless there is not a single dispute which has come before the Council which has not been checked and in some measure advanced towards solution. And so, I for one -- and I think many others as well -- will hold with reason to the hopeful view that we are -- even if slowly -- advancing towards a state where the rule of law will in the end prevail.

It is not my purpose today to talk to you about the many problems which have been before the Security Council since we have held membership. The time available does not permit the marshalling of the details required for their statement and explanation but there is one matter in which Canada has been specially concerned which I would like to bring before you because I believe that in the long-term view all our other security problems are transient in comparison and fade into insignificance before the dangers and the difficulties which it presents. I refer to the problem of the International Control of Atomic Energy which has troubled the nations of the world during the three and a half years which have passed since the first man-made atomic explosion took place in the desert of New Mexico on 16 July, 1945, when the first atomic bomb was detonated with awe-inspiring results in most remarkable accord with the prediction and prior calculation of the physicists.

Shortly thereafter two atomic bombs were exploded over Japan and these had very immediate consequences in inducing the surrender of that country. Thus World War II ended with the atomic bomb established as a weapon which stood in a class by itself. Even the earlier models used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented a concentration of explosive power some 5000 times greater than anything which could previously be carried in a single aircraft. By reason of continuing large-scale research, principally in the United States, it is only reasonable to accept that this factor has since been increased substantially.

While these new atomic weapons have this vast power, yet they are only fully effective when used in a surprise attack on concentrated targets. They do not therefore replace conventional armaments and they are not an absolute weapon in the sense that their employment by themselves could be expected to win a war.

The circumstances in which the effects of atomic bombs is to be most feared is when unsuspecting people are concentrated in great cities, when harbours are congested with unwarned shipping and before measures can be taken to disperse important large industries. In consequence what we have to dread is the secret accumulation in hostile lands of stocks of atomic bombs. This might be effected imperceptibly over a number of years and so it follows that even very small quantities of fissionable material have significance. Because of the vast power of the atomic weapon even a small stock is a very great menace and from the time that it is thought that these may be in the possession of hostile or possibly hostile states, there will be ever-present anxiety which can only be dispelled if arrangements are entered into not only for the prohibition of atomic energy for destructive purposes, but also, and even more important for the creation of safeguards and international controls which will give certainty to the universal enforcement of this prohibition.

Unfortunately it seems that in the current phase of world development that every improvement in rapidity of communication and movement has served not to promote agreement and accord between nations but to accentuate differences and sharpen disputes -- which is all the more reason why we must press forward patiently in the fuller organization of the United Nations.

Atomic energy is not just another military weapon. It has a dual character. On the one hand there are its potentialities for cataclysmic destruction -- on the other the almost limitless possibilities for beneficent peaceful use through which the frontiers of knowledge may be pressed back and the vistas of human understanding widened in most remarkable fashion. These visions intrigue the imagination and everyone would be very happy to facilitate this search for new knowledge by contributing the information and the help which they may have available. But, unfortunately as matters stand, it is not in all fields that there is freedom to give or to use information, nor can this be so because the same materials which are useful to the peaceful arts are also the materials of the bomb and in the hands of unscrupulous persons, even in comparatively small quantities may be a terrible menace to our security.

It is for this reason that, in all matters related to atomic energy, the requirements of national defence must take precedence. There can be no compromise of security until the position has been made safe by means of an international agreement for the control of atomic energy which will give acceptable safeguards.

The solution of this problem is not a simple matter. The secrets of nature being uncovered by the scientists cannot be wiped from the world's memory by edict or decree. The presence of fissionable material is a fact, for good or for evil, and certainly mankind will not consent to be deprived of the manifest advantages of atomic energy merely because of the destructive possibilities of its misuse.

The first step toward the creation of such an international agreement was made very shortly after the termination of the war by the United States, Great Britain and Canada in a declaration issued at Washington, D.C. on 15 November 1945. Recognizing the need for an international agreement, the President of the United States, and the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Canada proposed, as a matter of great urgency, the setting up of a Commission under the United Nations to study the problem and to make recommendations for its control.

This declaration was followed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.S.R. in Moscow in December, 1945, at which the Washington proposals were endorsed. These three Governments then invited France, China, and Canada to join with them in sponsoring the proposal at the General Assembly. At the first meeting of the General Assembly on January 24, 1946 in London, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was established by unanimous resolution.

The membership of this Commission comprises the eleven countries members for the time being of the Security Council, that is the five permanent members and the six non-permanent members each elected for two-year terms; Canada, as one of the original sponsors continues to be included even when she is not a member of the Security Council. The Commission is charged with making specific proposals, among other matters "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."

The Atomic Energy Commission first met in New York in June of the same year and during the following two years -- up to June 1948 -- in the course of some 240 meetings, it produced three reports.

In all, seventeen nations have served on the Commission for various periods and of these, fourteen, including Canada, are in agreement as to the general nature of the system of control required. The other three, which are the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet-dominated states of Poland and the Ukraine, hold different views. The plan of the majority provides for the creation of an international atomic authority which would own in trust for the nations of the world all uranium and thorium after they are taken from the ground. This authority would control the extent of the mining of these ores which are the only known materials from which energy can be released in substantial amounts by the fission of the atom. Production would be strictly related to consumption and there would be no accumulated stocks to cause anxiety.

The authority would own, operate, and manage all facilities handling dangerous amounts of fissionable material. It would conduct research in the field of atomic energy except that research requiring non-dangerous quantities only would be freely licensed with provision for full publication of findings.

The authority would administer the "quotas" of atomic energy materials, facilities or power allocated to each nation in accordance with the proposed atomic energy treaty and would build and operate plants within the nation's quota. No nation would be permitted to possess dangerous quantities of atomic fuels or to own plants for making them. Atomic weapons would be prohibited. The authority would be empowered to ascertain resources and to prevent secret activities.

It is the view of the majority that only with such a system operating satisfactorily would countries possessing atomic weapons be justified in disposing of their stocks of bombs and facilities for making them and giving to the world their secrets for the production of atomic energy. These nations feel that the only way by which security can be given in the world lies in the complete elimination of secrecy in atomic matters together with the institution of international inspection and control on such a comprehensive basis that it will provide adequate and acceptable safeguards against all possibility of the hazards of violations and evasions.

The majority of the members of the Commission are convinced not only that the system they have proposed will give the safeguards needed but that it is the only method by which this desired end can be achieved.

On the other hand the Soviet have put forward a plan which differs fundamentally. They have proposed the immediate outlawing of the atomic bomb and the destruction of existing stocks. After this would have been effected the Soviets concede the need for instituting what they call "strict international control" but their proposals in this connection on detailed examination have been shown to be merely a system of periodic visits to such plants only whose existence their respective governments had seen fit to disclose. There was also to be "special" inspection on suspicion but any method of gaining information on which suspicion might be based was carefully excluded.

The Commission's examination of these proposals showed that they would represent only an act of unilateral disarmament by the United States which, even if it were carried out, would give no assurance that any country engaged in atomic activities would not or could not secretly make and use the bomb in future.

This conclusion follows from the fact, to which I have already referred, that the fissionable materials which are the essential substances for such peaceful applications of atomic energy as the development in the future of atomic power, are also the explosive element of the bomb. In the absence of effective inspection and control these substances could readily be diverted clandestinely from peaceful to military use by a nation secretly preparing atomic war.

The majority members were therefore forced to the conclusion, despite every wish to find a basis of agreement, that they must reject the Soviet proposals as "completely ignoring the existing technical knowledge of the problem or providing an adequate basis for effective international control and the elimination of atomic weapons from national armaments."

Such was the situation in the Atomic Energy Commission in the spring of 1948. The Soviet were adamant against the acceptance of the elements of control which the majority were convinced were necessary and having regard to the far reaching and terrifying consequences of any doubt on these matters, the majority could accept nothing less.

As a result it became evident that the issue should be raised for clarification in the broader forum presented by the Third Session of the General Assembly then due to meet in Paris in September.

In proposing that the Security Council should be invited to accept this course, the majority members of the Commission after reaffirming the correctness of their proposals, pointed out that having concluded that part of their task concerned primarily with scientific and technological matters, they realized that the time had arrived when increased efforts should be made with regard to general considerations, including those of an international political character, the debate on which could be pressed with greater advantage in the General Assembly of the United Nations itself.

The attempt to solve the atomic energy "impasse" in the Security Council met on 22 June 1948 with the 26th veto exercised by the Soviet Union. However, a procedural motion proposed by Canada to refer the three reports of the Commission to the General Assembly "as a matter of special concern" was passed by a majority of 9-2.

There was thus created opportunity to test the conclusions of the majority both as regards their technical correctness and also, and most importantly, as to their acceptability to the nations members of the General Assembly.

I come now to the further development of these matters which took place in Paris during September, October and November last.

In the opening meetings of the General Assembly the Atomic Energy Commission's proposals were given wide support and the urgency of establishing effective control was expressed by many nations except the Soviet and its satellites whose delegates reiterated their insistence on "prohibition" of atomic weapons and the destruction of existing stocks.

To this end the Soviet raised two separate sets of proposals. In the one the prohibition of atomic weapons was combined with a project for an immediate arbitrary reduction of one-third in the conventional armaments of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The discussion of this proposal was principally related to conventional armaments and in the end the fallacies of this approach were fully exposed.

The other Soviet proposal introduced the idea of "simultaneous" conventions, the one for the prohibition of atomic weapons and the other for what the Soviet described as "effective international control." Both conventions were to be signed and to "enter into force and actual operation simultaneously."

Formerly the Soviet had insisted on prohibition and destruction of existing stocks as a first step. Now they claimed that in their new proposals they had made a great concession to promote agreement.

There is no doubt that, for a time, this new Soviet insistence on the world "simultaneous" confused the issue and raised false hopes in the minds of some of those who were anxiously concerned about the future. However in the discussion it soon became evident that the Soviet ideas on what would constitute effective international control had not advanced at all from their previous scheme which had already been subjected to the most meticulous examination as a result of which it had been rejected by the Commission as fundamentally inadequate.

It did not add in the least to the safety of the world to have "simultaneous" control when the elements of that control would lack the character deemed necessary to provide acceptable safeguards which would dispel suspicion and promote co-operation between nations. I can only describe the Soviet proposal as "specious". It was so recognized by a great majority in the General Assembly and decisively rejected. No nation outside the Soviet group voted for it.

The draft resolution put forward by Canada became the framework of the debate and after development in the Political Committee it provided that the Assembly should endorse the relevant portions of the majority proposals of the Atomic Energy Commission "as constituting the necessary basis" of an effective system of international control which would give adequate protection against the hazards of violations and evasions.

The Canadian resolution recognized the practical situation caused by the flat rejection of the Commission's proposals by the Soviet and its consequent inability to make progress in the technical matters within its competence until this "impasse" had been resolved. It recognized that these difficulties were largely political and it therefore provided a political method of endeavour to reconcile the dispute. This was that the six original sponsors should "meet together and consult in order to determine if there exists a basis for agreement on the international control of atomic energy. We proposed that this meeting should take place on "a high level" to determine a basis on which the Commission's work could be resumed.

A number of delegations reminded the General Assembly that the Atomic Energy Commission was not subject to the "veto" and suggested therefore that it should resume its work, ride over any Soviet objections and prepare a Treaty. On the other hand, most delegations supported us in the view that this would be unwise at this time as this procedure would result in accentuating and hardening the divisions of opinion between the Soviet and the rest of the world.

However, as the debate developed it became evident that a considerable number of delegations, while not subscribing to the view that the Commission should ride over the Soviet on the clauses of the Treaty, nevertheless felt that it would be well for the world if the Atomic Energy Commission remained in session so as to keep the whole of this dangerous situation under constant review. It was thought that if this were done the Commission might even be able to make progress on some aspects of its technical work.

The Canadian Delegation and those who had joined in the sponsorship of our resolution, particularly the United States and France, were happy to accede to this somewhat more hopeful view of the possibilities of progress and we therefore modified our proposal so as to provide that the Commission would resume its meetings and "proceed to the further study of such of the subjects remaining in its programme of work as it considers to be practicable and useful."

In this form the resolution went to a plenary session of the General Assembly where it received forty votes in favour to six against. Those against included the Soviet and Soviet satellites only. The twelve nations unaccounted for or abstaining include a number who have not yet made up their minds on this complex and difficult subject. A few made reservations because of special interest in uranium and thorium ores and unfortunately a number were absent because the vote came earlier than had been expected. Altogether it is thought that in one form or another some forty-six nations expressed in Paris their acceptance, at least in principle, of the majority proposals.

Thus I can say that the novel and far reaching project for the international control of atomic energy which has been evolved by the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission has met with acceptance by the great majority of the nations and we can feel therefore that this project commends itself to the conscience of the world.

This is most important for the future because it is the assurance which we sought when we took this great question to the General Assembly in Paris. We have been given it in generous measure and even the Soviet must now realize that they stand almost in isolation in their failure to accept the new conceptions of international organization which seem to us to be an inescapable condition for the survival of civilization in this atomic age.

We may hope that by continued, patient and persistent efforts in the Commission and through the meetings of the "six" sponsors to be held later in the year, we will yet be able to carry conviction to the peoples of the Soviet. There is a little time left which can safely be given to this process of education and persuasion and we must use it to the best advantage.

The first meeting of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission subsequent to the Sessions of the General Assembly in Paris was held at Lake Success on Friday, 18 February, 1949 under the chairmanship of the Delegate of the U.S.S.R. It resulted in the acceptance of a Canadian proposal designed to facilitate the further work of the Commission and the preparation for the meetings of the "six" sponsors to be held later on in the year. These matters will now proceed in the Commission and in its various Committees and Sub-committees with the objective of developing reports there which might be presented to the Fourth Session of the General Assembly which meets in New York in September next.

The next meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission was held on 25 February 1949 and at it the Soviet representative re-submitted the proposal which the Soviet had made at the General Assembly for the preparation of "a draft convention for the prohibition of atomic weapons and a draft convention for the control of atomic energy, proceeding from the principle that both conventions must be concluded and put into effect simultaneously."

It seems somewhat extraordinary, even from the Soviet, that the Commission should be asked to take up a proposal which has already been decisively rejected by the General Assembly, but perhaps we should view this action as evidence that they are becoming derelict in ideas. We have again made it clear that the matter which concerns us is not the question of whether there should be simultaneous conventions for prohibition and control but whether in the matter of control the U.S.S.R. will continue to reject the essential elements on which alone such international control can be made fully effective.

Because of the illness of Jacob Malik, the U.S.S.R. representative, no further meetings of the Commission have since been held, so no decision has been taken on what is to be done with the Soviet proposal.

My own view is that, vexatious and repetitious as it is, it would be well to refer it to a Committee so that once again for the better understanding of the position by the general public we will be able to marshal the facts which clearly show it to be quite inadequate.

I have spoken at some length descriptive of the discussions on international control of atomic energy which have taken place in the several organs of the United Nations concerned -- the General Assembly -- the Security Council -- and the Commission itself. My reason was two-fold. First, to endeavour to carry to you a conception of the vital importance of establishing proper international control of atomic energy and secondly, so that I might tell you something of the part which has fallen to Canada to discharge. The reason we have been invited to permanent membership in the Atomic Energy Commission is in consequence of the great contribution which our engineers and chemists and physicists have made to the science of nuclear physics, both before and during the war. It is because of this and of this only that Canada has been accorded the right and the duty to participate in these vital political decisions which must now be reached. I am happy to say that the contributions of our young scientists continues unabated not only in the National Research Council but also in ever widening circles in our universities as well.

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