

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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ALGERIA

Statement by Mr. Roch Pinard, Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Delegation, in the First Political Committee of a United Nations General Assembly, New York on February 8, 1957.

The Canadian Delegation has followed with great interest the speeches made on the question of Algeria in this committee. We are still a little doubtful of the wisdom of discussing a question which under the Charter falls so clearly within the domestic jurisdiction of a member state, and which has been so clearly and logically documented by the distinguished Foreign Minister of France, but we are glad that the Delegation of France has accepted the opinion of the majority and has agreed to present its views on the problem. I say that I am glad of it because the presence of France in this committee is of great importance to the work of the United Nations, and the French case needs to be presented to the world. I think the decision of the Delegation of France has been amply justified because the lucid speech of Mr. Pineau has placed in perspective what France has accomplished in Algeria and what it proposes to do in the future.

I shall not, however, Mr. Chairman, attempt to go in detail into the background of this question, since it has been presented from both points of view with great thoroughness. It is a problem of immense complexity on which we in this committee could hardly be expected to produce a solution satisfactory to everyone, even if we were competent to do so.

My Delegation has weighed carefully the evidence of the French Government. It seems to us that the latter is aware of the need to relate its policies to the necessities of a changing world and that it has embarked in a direction which will result in a state of affairs in Algeria that should satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the two main elements in the population. Such a relationship cannot be altered overnight without the danger of bringing down the whole structure which has so much of the constructive in its past.

While we may deplore much of what has happened in Algeria during recent years, we hope sincerely that good will and reason will prevail and that the two sides in Algeria will work out a solution peacefully, and without interference.

For my Delegation, it is highly questionable that this process can be spurred on in the right direction by discussions in the United Nations, or by the adoption of resolutions unacceptable to the party principally concerned. I think it is also clear that foreign intervention is not leading in the direction of a reasonable and bloodless solution of the problem.

We in Canada have had some experience both of the great contributions which France has made and will continue to make to the civilization of the world, and of the problems of working out a harmonious political and social entity in a society composed of races of differing cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, as the distinguished Foreign Minister of France mentioned. We have succeeded in Canada, though I can assure the members of this committee it was not accomplished overnight. It took generations of patient work, on the part of both communities, and I would like to suggest to this committee that a happy equilibrium cannot be evolved in Algeria, in an infinitely more involved and difficult situation, without the exercise of infinite restraint and political wisdom.

My Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, in speaking on the problem of unity in Canada, only last Saturday, stressed the need not to minimize the cultural and economic factors tending towards co-operation between the two ethnic groups, nor at the same time to exaggerate their differences. I have the impression, in listening to some of our friends in the present debate, that they would try to do precisely the contrary with regard to Algeria and I would like to make a plea in this committee for a balanced approach to the problem.

I was impressed, as I am sure all of us were, by the dispassionate expose of the contribution of France to the evolution of Algeria. We knew this in the abstract, but the repetition of it here helps to bring home the need to proceed with caution in order not to undermine this contribution, a contribution, I might add, which extends to Africa south of the Sahara as well. And, in this connection, I should like to draw the attention of the Committee to the plea recently made by that great humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer, who can certainly not be accused of partisan politics, and whose work in Africa needs no underlining, to avoid exacerbating further a difficult situation.

We must also keep firmly in mind the immense progress made by France in the last year and a half in its relations with countries in which it formerly exercised full control. Morocco and Tunisia are now completely independent countries

and respected members of this body. Responsible elected representatives of the Togolese people are now exercising full control in the management of their domestic affairs. In other significant parts of Africa steps have been taken and are being taken to increase local autonomy and encourage the fullest possible participation of the people. I do not want to suggest that there is necessarily an analogy between the territories and countries I have mentioned and Algeria. We are fully aware of the very unique problems of the latter, but we do believe that France's record of achievements in connection with these countries is proof of French good faith.

We must recognize the enlightened role France is playing in political, economic and cultural development in all these areas. We have heard from the distinguished representative of France of the plans already in hand for the greater autonomy, security and prosperity of all Algerians; indeed for a prosperity to be enjoyed by the peoples of a much wider African community. I do feel that on the basis of the examples I have mentioned we should leave the question of Algeria's future to be worked out by France with the elected representatives of the area, confident that a just and liberal solution is what we can expect from that country which has given so much to the civilization of the world.

This is not to underestimate the enormous importance to the world of Arab culture. It is indeed in the combining of French civilization and the great culture of the Arabs, now in renaissance, that the hope for this part of the world exists, and it was precisely in this encouraging direction--the great new future--that Mr. Mollet pointed in his declaration of intentions of January 9.

S/C