

Text of speech made by the Minister for External Affairs Mr. Frank Aiken, T.D., in the First (Political) Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on 17th October, 1958, concerning nuclear disarmament.

I have followed with careful attention the statements made here on the important questions relating to disarmament. It is encouraging that the tone of our discussions despite the many different points of view expressed has usually been calm and thoughtful and that the debate has, on the whole, generated more light than heat.

This atmosphere encourages us to hope that the work of the Geneva experts will soon be turned into a political reality thus laying a firm foundation for further progress towards the total prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Chairman, we have several resolutions before us and, to my mind, what is really important is not the differences between them so much as the considerable measure of agreement which they represent. My delegation does not consider the distances between the resolution proposed by Argentina and 16 other states, that of Afghanistan and twelve other states and the Soviet resolution on the discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests to be unbridgeable. While I am also submitting to the committee for discussion some specific proposals, I wish to emphasize that my delegation hopes that this committee will finally produce a single unanimous resolution. We would prefer the passage of such a unanimous resolution to voting on a series of separate resolutions - voting which would necessarily emphasize the points of difference which remain rather than the measure of agreement which has been reached.

On the question of testing of nuclear weapons I think we should concentrate on that which we can quickly and certainly attain. I am sure that we all hope for a

permanent suspension "for all time" to use the phrase of the distinguished representative of the Soviet Union. My delegation considers that it would be more constructive to attain a short-term agreement - even for only a year, but with the prospect of renewal - as the United States and sixteen other states have proposed, rather than to refuse to be satisfied with anything less than a permanent agreement while, in the meantime, nuclear explosions occur from the Arctic Ocean to the South Pacific. My delegation therefore regards the United States resolution as a constructive measure representing a very real step forward in the field of nuclear disarmament.

In proposing his resolution the distinguished delegate of the United States drew attention to the evolutions of the policy of his Government as evidenced in the various clauses of the resolution. Such a statement is, I think, very welcome to most members of this committee. It is, in the highest degree, the common interest of us all that the policy of so great a country should consistently evolve to meet the demands of a continually changing world situation.

An important factor in this changing world situation today - a factor to which I referred in my speech in the general debate in the Assembly and to which several speakers, including the distinguished representative of India, have also referred - is the imminent danger that more and more states will come to possess nuclear weapons. My delegation considers it necessary to focus attention on this problem.

With this in mind we have submitted certain amendments to the draft resolution of the seventeen powers. We have also tabled a draft resolution.

The amendments and the resolution are in the hands of the committee. The amendments, if accepted, would urge the non-nuclear powers, during a specified period, to refrain from manufacturing or acquiring nuclear weapons and would urge the nuclear powers to refrain from supplying such weapons to states which do not now possess them. We have specified a period of time in order to co-ordinate our proposals with those in the seventeen-power resolution, and in the hope of attracting the widest possible measure of acceptance. But we have no wish to conceal the fact that we regard the proposed temporary measure of nuclear restriction as only a step towards a permanent ban on the further dissemination of nuclear weapons - permanent in the sense that it should remain in being until the total abolition of nuclear weapons renders it superfluous. Similarly in the case of our draft resolution, which proposed an ad hoc commission to study the problem of the dissemination of nuclear weapons, it is our hope and belief that this study would lead to a permanent ban on such dissemination. Both our amendments and our draft resolution therefore are conceived as steps towards the restriction of nuclear weapons - a restriction which in its turn would be a step towards their abolition.

The first point I wish to stress, Mr. Chairman, is that as this Assembly, and the great powers represented in it, are unable speedily to abolish nuclear weapons completely, they ought at least, in our opinion, to take steps aimed at preventing the threat from becoming even greater. It is in our opinion a great tragedy that the

Baruch proposals for the international control of nuclear weapons and nuclear development were not accepted and implemented 12 years ago. If we do not soon succeed in limiting the number of states making or possessing nuclear weapons, the problem of saving the world from nuclear destruction may well have passed beyond the power of man to solve long before another 12 years have passed.

The danger of nuclear weapons to humanity, it seems to us does not merely increase in direct ratio to the number of those possessing them. It seems likely to increase in geometric progression. Those who now possess nuclear weapons are a few great and highly developed states, with great urban populations, with much to lose and little to gain in a nuclear war. Their potential adversaries are in the same case and have the power to retaliate. As in the case of every other military invention, however, the harnessing of nuclear energy for military purposes is bound to become simpler and cheaper with the passing of time. Sooner or later therefore, unless this organisation takes urgent preventive steps, this weapon will pass into the hands of states with much less to lose. Furthermore, as it comes into their hands, it may give them a temporary but enormous advantage over their adversaries - an advantage which they will be sorely tempted to exploit.

We can all think, Mr. Chairman, of several regions of the world where fierce antagonisms exist, held in suspense only by a kind of truce or deadlock. That truce, that deadlock could be broken all too easily, if one side or the other possessed nuclear weapons. In short, the nuclear stalemate

ceases to apply once nuclear weapons begin to come into the hands of the smaller countries. Furthermore, nothing except international measures to prevent the dissemination of such weapons, can prevent them from coming, ultimately, not merely to small and poor states but also to revolutionary organisations. All through history portable weapons which are the monopoly of the great powers today become the weapons of smaller powers and revolutionary groups tomorrow. And since local wars and revolutions almost always involve some degree of great power patronage and rivalry, the use of nuclear weapons by a small state or revolutionary group could lead, only too easily, to the outbreak of general war. One obsolete, Hiroshima-type bomb, used by a small and desperate country to settle a local quarrel, could be the detonator for world-wide thermo-nuclear war, involving the destruction of our whole civilization.

I do not think it necessary to emphasize further the dangers which will arise if nuclear weapons become more widespread. No one is likely to dispute the existence or the gravity of these dangers. Difference of opinion is likely to concern, not the reality of the danger, but the adequacy and appropriateness of the measures with which we propose to combat it.

We are conscious of the objections which can be urged, with varying degrees of validity, against our proposals. Apart from the objection - with which I have already dealt - that the proposals are not sufficiently comprehensive, the main objections are, I believe, four in number.

The first is that, by establishing, even temporarily, two categories of member states, nuclear "haves" and "have nots", the amendments we propose infringe in theory the

principle of the sovereign equality of nations and reduce in practice the prestige of the "have not" nations.

The second is that by limiting freedom of action in the disposal of nuclear weapons, the proposals might impair the effectiveness of the various systems of defensive alliance to which many members states belong.

The third objection is that agreement on the suspension of tests in itself renders the measures we propose superfluous.

The fourth objection is that, since the presence of nuclear weapons is virtually impossible to detect, it would be impossible to control compliance with the obligations here envisaged - and particularly compliance with the requirement that states which possess nuclear weapons should not hand them over to non-nuclear states.

I propose to consider these objections in order.

As regards the first objection, I cannot see that a voluntary decision not to manufacture or accept a given type of weapon infringes in any way the principle of the equality of sovereign states. We are not seeking to establish any principle to the effect that some states shall have the right to these weapons and other states shall not. We are suggesting that the Assembly should ask certain states to refrain, over a given period, from the exercise of a right which they indubitably possess - the right to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons. In such a voluntary abnegation no limitation of sovereignty is involved - any more than limitation of sovereignty is involved in any of the innumerable international conventions, the signatories of which bind

themselves to do, or to refrain from doing, certain things. Similarly, we are suggesting that certain states, and also without any impairment of sovereignty, refrain from the exercise of a right which they possess - the right to supply these weapons to others.

There remains the argument, seldom actually stated, that for a country to abjure these weapons while others possess them involves a sacrifice of prestige. We think that argument is based on a false idea of how prestige - the good opinion of mankind - is likely to be won today. True prestige, it seems to us, will now be won not by those who may press their way into the nuclear club, but by those countries which possess the skill and resources necessary to produce nuclear weapons but which, by deliberate choice, and in the interests of peace, refrain from producing them. Such nations will win the admiration of mankind, and their influence will be greater, not less, by reason of their wise example.

The second objection concerns the supposed impairment of the effective working of alliances. This is more a hypothetical than an actual objection. No nuclear power has in fact yet found it necessary for the effective working of an alliance to place its nuclear weapons in the control of a non-nuclear ally. The reasons why they have not done so are plain. Military pacts cannot in their nature be absolute and permanent. They are ad hoc groupings designed to meet a given historical situation, and change is the law of all historical situations. It is easy to believe that/has seemed a good and sufficient reason, hitherto, for not handing over nuclear weapons. We hope it will continue to seem so in the future.

But the objection which I am now considering against these proposals - the objection that they might impair the effective functioning of military alliances - does imply that in certain circumstances, and to secure some military advantage, nuclear powers would consider handing these weapons over to non-nuclear allies. That very possibility seems to us to represent a danger against which we should provide by international agreement now. Let us grant that it may at some time appear militarily advantageous to give these weapons outright to allied forces, rather than keep them stored in the control of military units belonging to the nuclear power itself. Is not the sacrifice of the ^{hypothetical} future military advantage well worthwhile if it can secure the actual and enormous collective advantage of checking the dissemination of nuclear weapons?

I have referred already to the dangers which the dissemination of these weapons involves. I do so again only to reduce this objection to its proper proportions. Our problem is that the dissemination of nuclear weapons if it takes place will increase the risks of war and render nuclear disarmament more difficult. Can we allow ourselves to be deterred from any serious effort to diminish those risks by considerations of hypothetical military advantage - advantage in a struggle which, if it occurs, will be so indiscriminately destructive that the whole concept of a military advantage will probably become destitute of meaning?

As regards the third objection, we, like all other members of the committee I am sure, would warmly welcome a suspension, and eventual cessation, of nuclear weapons testing. But we cannot agree that such a suspension or cessation of tests would automatically put a stop to the

wider dissemination of the weapons themselves. If a state has the scientific skill and resources to make nuclear weapons it can proceed to build up a stockpile even without testing, with practical certainty that the weapons will be effective. Furthermore, any state could obtain such weapons from an existing nuclear state, without tests. It is, therefore, not correct to say that a cessation of tests would render the measures we propose superfluous.

The fourth objection, I acknowledge to be ^{of} more substance than the other three, and indeed in an altogether different category from them. Here we come up against the central difficulty which is encountered by all far-reaching disarmament proposals - the problem of detecting the presence of unexploded nuclear weapons. In the case of any proposed comprehensive agreement the difficulty as we know concerns possible breaches of an undertaking to destroy stocks. One country, in good faith, may destroy all its stocks only to find later that another country, in bad faith, has held some back. So far as we know there is as yet no certain means of detection which would safeguard against that. Similarly in the case of the present proposals, there is probably no sure means of detecting certain kinds of non-compliance - for example the secret delivery of the weapon by a nuclear to a non-nuclear power. It is hard to imagine, however, what advantage any nuclear power could derive from a breach of the suggested engagement which would be commensurate with the potential disadvantages.

These disadvantages include - if the measures we propose are adopted and followed - the risk of being exposed as the violator of an engagement to this Assembly.

If such a breach were detected - and it would be detected if the ally supplied made any use of the weapon - the supplying power would be exposed as an enemy of peace and of humanity. It may be said that some powers are more sensitive to such exposure than are others. True, but at the lowest all great powers are conscious of the propaganda effects of their actions and a detected breach of this agreement would be a propaganda defeat of the first magnitude.

The second disadvantage is the basic and inherent one that no power can part with these weapons without parting with a measure of its own power and influence. It is hard to imagine any power running risks of exposure and obloquy only to arrive at a result which might prove gravely prejudicial to its own vital interests.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, may I say that our aim must be to foster the gradual evolution of the United Nations towards a system of world government in which disputes between nations will be settled by law based on justice rather than by force. A "new approach" as Ambassador Lodge has termed it, of clearing the way for political agreement by technical discussions of the technical problems involved is, we all hope, the great discovery in the political field which will break the long deadlock on disarmament. Our hope is that the end of that deadlock is at hand and that a comprehensive agreement on disarmament may at last be within sight. But while we await that comprehensive agreement, we must remain alert to what is happening in a changing world. The old dangers which we know so well

are still with us, but while we are still discussing them new dangers which may prove fatal are beginning to arise. It is on those dangers, and to the urgent necessity of taking measures to avert them, that my delegation wishes to focus the attention of the committee.