

Atomic Weapons Proposals

Two items on the agenda dealt with the use and testing of nuclear weapons. The Canadian Government, with its lengthy experience in the Disarmament Sub-Committee of the United Nations, was concerned by the dangers of propaganda exploitation by Communist delegations of these complex and controversial questions. The concern of the Canadian Government was increased by the fact that the agenda items in question were initiated by non-Communist sponsors. The International Committee of the Red Cross had prepared for the Conference, after long and detailed study, a paper entitled "Draft Rules for the Limitation of Dangers Incurred by the Civilian Population in Time of War". The Draft Rules, dealing with limitations in the conduct of future wars in the interests of civilian populations, were designed to form the basis of an international convention to supplement the existing Geneva Conventions. The Draft Rules, while admirable in theory, appeared to Western disarmament experts to oversimplify the basic problems involved in achieving an effective disarmament agreement. The same consideration applied to a draft resolution circulated by the Japanese Red Cross Society which was concerned primarily with the cessation of testing of nuclear weapons.

It seemed to the Canadian Government that the superficial appeal of the proposals put forward by the International Committee and the Japanese Red Cross Society on the use and testing of nuclear weapons might imperil the Canadian position on those complicated problems. The possibility that the proposals would be exploited for propaganda purposes by Communist delegations persuaded the Canadian Government and a number of other governments, which traditionally had sent observer delegations to International Red Cross Conferences, to give their delegations to the XIXth Conference voting status. The Communist delegations did, in fact, attempt to use the proposals to win support for repetitious Communist "ban the bomb" propaganda but other delegations had comparatively little difficulty in dissuading the Conference from going on record in favour of resolutions on atomic weapons which would have been ineffective and damaging to the cause of peace. The statutes of the International Conference theoretically preclude debates on political issues. This consideration helped discourage Communist propaganda manoeuvres on the atomic weapons issues and left Communist delegations almost isolated in the votes on their propaganda proposals. It should be added that the Communist delegations almost invariably joined ultimately in accepting compromise resolutions which were generally acceptable. These resolutions disposed of the possibility of an international convention to consider the Draft Rules in their present form and simply provided for drawing attention of governments to the Draft Rules, the dangers to humanity of atomic weapons and the desirability of an effective disarmament agreement. The Delegation of the Indian Red Cross Society played an active and effective role in deflecting the dangers inherent in the original atomic weapons proposals.

"Reunion of Families"

Debate on another highly controversial issue—"The Reunion of Families"—ended happily. Communist delegations strongly supported an Hungarian proposal that the Conference go on record as favouring the return to Hungary of children who had left with the refugee migrations following the 1956 uprising. The Canadian Red Cross Society countered this proposal with a resolu-