

Appraisals from consultants to the Canadian delegation

Editor's note: The United Nations Special Session on Disarmament was held in New York from May 23 to July 1, 1978. The Canadian delegation, led by Don Jamieson, consisted, in addition to regular diplomatic representatives and parliamentary observers, of five consultants drawn from outside the Government. The consultants were: Dr Norman Alcock, President of the Canadian Peace Research Institute, Dr W. Harriet Critchley of the Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, Dr William Epstein, Visiting Professor at Carleton University, Special Fellow at UNITAR and former Director of the Disarmament Division of the UN Secretariat, Dr Albert Legault, Professor of Political Science, Laval University, and Director General of the Quebec Centre of International Relations, and Mr Murray Thomson of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Ottawa, and Education Secretary of "Project Ploughshares". *International Perspectives* invited each of these five consultants to write brief appraisals of the special session. No attempt was made to co-ordinate the approaches adopted by the authors. As a result there is some overlap in the five articles. Nonetheless the result is five different perspectives on the special session and the problems of security and disarmament. The next issue of *International Perspectives* will continue the discussion of these and related problems with articles by George Ignatieff, King Gordon and Marcel Merle.

The ratchet effect

By Norman Alcock

Let me begin with the good news. The men and women at the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament – delegates and Secretariat alike – are in my opinion among the world's best people. With a very few (conspicuous) exceptions, they are not self-serving – just the opposite; they are public servants in the finest sense. Steadily, persistently and patiently (often incredibly patiently) they worked for disarmament. Moreover, a machinery is emerging at the United Nations that in time – with some small but important changes – could become a fledgling world government. Blocs (like political parties) caucus regularly together, a single working language has developed (English), which speeds up the exchange of ideas, and above all, a graciousness – even elegance – of style marks the negotiating debates. It is exciting to watch.

Now for the bad news – disarmament hasn't a

chance. This observation is for me the single most devastating finding of my five weeks stay in New York.

Why? Because of the "ratchet effect", in fact because of "ratchet effects" of the *first kind* and of the *second kind* – but let me explain. Centuries of military experience have determined that for maximum security a nation and its allies should have military forces superior to, or at least equal to, those of its neighbour and its allies. According to this balance-of-power idea, not only is one's neighbour less likely to attack because of one's superior force but, if one is provoked to fight a war, one is also more likely to win. Thus it is always legitimate to *increase* one's own forces, unilaterally and when one pleases. It is not all right to decrease your forces, however, unless you can at the same time be assured that your neighbour's forces will be going down too.

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Swords and plowshares

By W. Harriet Critchley

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:4

When men resort to arms, it is not that they love peace the less, but that they love their kind of peace the more.

St Augustine, *City of God*, 19,12

The tenth special session of the United Nations was history's most representative international disarmament conference to date, in terms of the number of participating states and non-governmental organizations, and it was probably the best-prepared. Scores of ideas and draft contributions were submitted, combined and modified during the months of preparatory committee meetings. Many talented and experienced diplomats from all regions of the world dedicated long hours of effort to producing the draft document that was to form

the basis for deliberations during the session.

The document itself was rather long, and formidably complex. It addressed a wide range of arms-limitation and disarmament issues, including: suggestions for a declaration on disarmament objectives and priorities; measures that could be taken, as precursors to further disarmament, to strengthen international security and build confidence among states; ways to promote education about disarmament and to train more people to proficiency for arms-limitation negotiations; a list of disarmament issues, such as the putative link between disarmament and socio-economic development, which will require further study before they can be shaped into specific proposals. For many of the professional diplomats, the crucial part of the draft document (indeed, of the special session proceedings) was a section containing

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