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## William Epstein

# Tlatelolco and the Golden Age of Détente

■ William "Bill" Epstein has been longer at the United Nations and working officially on disarmament than "anyone in history," he once said. Born and raised in Alberta, he had enlisted as a private and was a captain at Canadian military headquarters in London in 1945. Because he had a law degree, he was there dealing with claims made for the damage done by Canadian troops in Britain. One day at the end of 1945, he was telephoned from Vincent Massey's office at Canada House and asked if he was interested in a job in the UN Secretariat working for the Preparatory Commission meeting in London. "It was like asking a man in the desert, would he like a drink of water." He started immediately and was still in army uniform in Church House when photographers from *The Times* of London and *Life* magazine came by. He recalls those early days:

"There was a Russian in charge of the Political and Security Council Affairs section, and I went to work in that section. In those days everyone worked on everything. One night, when things were hectic during the Preparatory Commission, there was Sir Gladwyn Jebb, the executive secretary, in his shirtsleeves rolling off documents on a Gestetner machine. There was a tremendous feeling of working together and, although in the background there were real political problems between East and West, in the Secretariat we were working on technical things and there was really very good co-operation.

"Then, when they decided to move the UN headquarters to the United States, we went to New York in March 1946, where the UN's temporary office was in Hunter College. We had to start from scratch, and very soon we started meetings of the Security Council and some meetings were held in the Henry Hudson Hotel. Later we moved to the Sperry plant at Lake Success. It was a bit chaotic in terms of facilities, but it was marvellous in terms of morale. Everybody had a gleam in his eyes about this wonderful new body. Everyone thought we might get a so-called international police force under Article 43 of the Charter and that would give real teeth to the UN.... But by late 1946, the Baruch Plan for the control of atomic energy had been vetoed by the Russians, who said it was intended to preserve an American monopoly; the 1946 peace conference in Europe had broken down; and the Russians started more or less taking over Eastern Europe. Then there was no basis on which they could reach agreement on establishing an international police force."

Bill Epstein remained in the Political and Security Council Affairs department until his official retirement "on grounds of statutory senility" in 1973. His departmental head was always a Russian and he says, "I got on with the intelligent Russians marvellously, but there were only two really bright ones. One of them was Anatoly Dobrynin, who became the Soviet ambassador in Washington soon after leaving the UN. You could talk to them frankly...." He was acting chief of the Middle East section during the exciting years 1946 through 1950 and then became head of Disarmament Affairs for 23 years. Since his official retirement he has held an emeritus position as a senior special fellow at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. He increased his Canadian ties by becoming a visiting professor at four Canadian universities from 1974 to 1978 and also chairperson of the Canadian