

difficult for the ordinary citizen to apply a cost-benefit test even if he has the will to do so. If one participant in public discussion argues that the development-assistance program promotes Canadian economic interests while another claims that these interests could be advanced much more efficiently by other means and still another suggests that the program does not contribute to the country's economic prosperity at all, how is the ordinary man to decide the issue? Without an expenditure of time and resources unreasonable to expect even of the most conscientious citizen, the task is obviously impossible. Except for occasional expressions of scepticism by Members of Parliament from poorer regions of the country ("charity begins at home"), the normal response is simply to abandon serious consideration of the problem and accept what the government does as a reasonable (since invisible) manifestation of public morality. In these circumstances, the government has substantial, though certainly not unlimited, freedom to respond as it sees fit to the demands of the international community.

It is not clear, however, that burying the issue in this way can sustain a *major* response to pressures for a new international order, such as would involve a genuine and highly-visible redistribution of wealth at domestic expense. That this is so is demonstrated, for example, by the difficulties encountered by developing countries in their attempt to secure significant concessions on tariffs. Since the free admission of cheap foreign imports (textiles are the standard Canadian example) has a direct and immediate impact on the previously-protected sectors of the domestic constituency - an impact whose origins are un-

ambiguous - , the underlying conflict between domestic and external welfare becomes clear and the policy-maker is compelled to choose. In practice, he has tended to choose in favour of the first of the three strategies discussed above, thereby acceding to the practical requirements of domestic politics and reasserting, by implication, the primacy of his commitment to the premises of "responsible government."

Quite apart, therefore, from the technical and managerial complexities of the new international agenda, which create difficulties for the *practical* conduct of the "responsible government" system, we may well be reaching a position in which the political leadership will be able to respond meaningfully to demands for a more equitable international order only if it violates its domestic social contract and puts the interests of "foreigners" ahead of the interests of its own constituents. In practice, the processes of "muddling through" may continue to obscure the issue - and of course it will be argued, rightly or wrongly, that short-term sacrifices are necessary in the long-term self-interest. But the problem is not a trivial one, and there is nothing in the philosophical underpinnings of Western governmental practice that will make it easy to solve.

Demands for global economic change thus entail a claim not only against the wealth of the developed countries but also against the fundamental premises of their politics. There may be irony in the observation that, at a time when nationalism appears to be in almost universal favour, its principal institutional vehicle, the "sovereign" nation state, is experiencing, on both moral and practical grounds, its most significant challenge to date.

## Primer on Canada's approach to UN disarmament session

By G.R. Skinner

In international affairs, arms control and disarmament add up to one of the most compelling - and intractable - issues of our time. How to construct practical measures to reduce arms and armed forces while maintaining adequate levels of security has been the subject of a debate virtually infinite in variation and complexity. The existence of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has imposed a sense of urgency; and the asymmetrical economic and political relations between

the developed and developing worlds have also entered into the debate. Much of the vocabulary of arms control and disarmament is daunting in its technicality and, like the debate itself, has sometimes obscured rather than clarified the actual impediments to progress - political and other tensions among states.

The special session of the United Nations General Assembly, which is meeting between May 23 and June 28, 1978, in New York, is not the first, and it is unlikely to be