

determined, re-opened the issue. It finally forced Harkness from the cabinet and defeated the government.

Cabinet conflicts

Robinson, reflecting the feelings of many external affairs officers of the period, writes with warmth and affection of Green personally. The external affairs minister was, however, being unrealistic in view of the continuing level of international danger. The long disarmament effort of those years was really a paper exercise; it consistently failed to modify Soviet positions on force levels, and failed equally to provide any realistic grounds for optimism. That had to wait for Mikhail Gorbachev a quarter-of-a-century later. Green's prolonged stubbornness in blocking an essential defence decision would have been tenable only if there had been even faint signs of progress in the Geneva talks. There were none; the negotiations were the great dead end of Cold War diplomacy. The struggle which ruined the government was sterile and this adds to the burden of blame that can fairly be placed on Diefenbaker.

Because of the government's hesitancy during the opening phase of the Cuban missile crisis, again reflecting a Green victory over Harkness, as well as the Prime Minister's indecisiveness, Canadian public opinion was led by John Kennedy from Washington, not by Diefenbaker from Ottawa. That was a grave failure to meet the responsibilities of leadership. As Robinson reveals, however, the blame was not entirely Canadian, and since he is never a polemicist his account has more justice than others. The crisis involved North American defence, and the Americans were justified in expecting Canada to meet the commitments of the NORAD agreement. Kennedy, however, allowed his intense dislike of the Canadian Prime Minister to lead him into offensive tactics. An essential condition of the NORAD agreement, which the Diefenbaker government, not the Liberals, had negotiated, was that the two partners would consult each other in moments of crisis. Kennedy rejected American consultation with Canada at the gravest moment that has ever developed for North American defence. Canada was informed of vital decisions at the last moment and expected to fall in line as an obedient junior partner. This aspect of the critical period has never been well-known to Canadians and Robinson's account, therefore, has special value. Diefenbaker's deep resentment of this American tactic was thoroughly justified and it would, or at least should, inspire the same reaction in any Canadian leader. Consultation with allies is not a superpower strong point. This does not excuse, however,

Diefenbaker's own failure to provide the Canadian people with the leadership they desperately needed during a great crisis.

Throughout the book Robinson reveals the extent to which Diefenbaker's attitudes were constantly affected by his often very accurate reading of the state of Canadian public opinion. In a populist that is probably to be expected, but it was a weakness that he so often reacted to opinion instead of making effective efforts to shape and lead it. People who hold the highest offices have an obligation to lead their nation's opinion as well as their actions.

Diefenbaker's contribution

There were other areas in which the Diefenbaker record is much more favorable and it is unfortunate that this aspect of his career has been so obscured by the final great failure. It is, of course, beyond the scope of Robinson's book. Diefenbaker paved the way for medicare and gave it a sound foundation through his appointment of the Hall Commission. He brought the old age pension system onto a meaningful basis. He opened up trade with China during the period of the sterile, American-led anti-Chinese quarantine.

His political opponents can hardly be expected to appreciate what was probably his greatest contribution to this country: he broke the Liberal Party's unhealthy monopoly on federal power, established through Mackenzie King's skill in building a new coalition of political forces. It had continued too long. The Liberals had controlled Canadian government without interruption from 1935 to 1957. A monopoly of power of this length is particularly unhealthy in the parliamentary system because it is without any established checks and balances. It had led the Liberals into the trap of actually believing that they were Canada's natural governing power and that they possessed a "right" to be in office. They did not view political power then, as they have come to in defeat, as something which must always be won from the public by persuasion and good efforts. By breaking the monopoly, Diefenbaker also brought the Conservative Party back to a fundamental health that it had lacked since R.B. Bennett's defeat in the mid-1930s, if not from the end of World War I. The great historic role of John Diefenbaker is that he paved the way to a return to the essential alternation of power between parties, which had withered and temporarily died. The Conservative Party's leaders since then could probably not have achieved that without Diefenbaker's short but great impact on public opinion. □