

Report to External Affairs Committee

On March 3, the Standing Committee on External Affairs heard the following exposition of Canada's external policy by Mr. Green:

... As you know, during the debate in the House, I dealt with quite a few different subjects having to do with the Department of External Affairs. There were, however, some things which I did not have the time to touch upon. If it would be satisfactory to the Committee, I would like to give a brief summary on these different questions. As soon as that has been done I would be very glad to try to deal with any points members of the Committee wish to raise.

Law of the Sea

The first topic has to do with the Conference on the Law of the Sea which is to commence in Geneva within approximately two weeks. This subject will be receiving a great deal of attention in international discussions in the course of the next few months. Primarily it has to do with the breadth of the territorial sea and coastal fishing limits...

This subject is of great importance in international affairs and of particular significance for Canada. We are the sixth largest fishing nation in the world, the fourth largest trading nation, and the country with the world's longest coastline; so that the breadth of the territorial sea and fishing limits are matters which could hardly fail to be of concern to the Canadian Government at a time when all members of the United Nations will be gathering shortly in a second attempt to reach agreed rules of law on these two subjects.

As the members of the Committee know, the First Conference on the Law of the Sea was held in 1958 and, after lengthy discussions, it succeeded in adopting four conventions which comprehensively regulate the territorial sea, the continental shelf, conservation and high-seas fishing and navigation; but, notwithstanding these achievements, the conference failed to reach agreement on two cardinal points, the breadth of the territorial sea and fishing limits, which are the very foundation of the code of law adopted by the first conference. In other words, they did have a good deal to their credit; they worked out most of the problems, but the two key problems, which also are the two most difficult ones, they were unable to decide. Consequently, the United Nations General Assembly, at its thirteenth session in 1958, called for a second conference to be convened in Geneva in March and April 1960, in order to reach a solution to these questions.

Now, you may wonder why the international community has not yet been able to agree to uniform rules for the territorial sea and fishing limits, and why these subjects have become of such great importance in present-day international affairs.

The answer to that question is not a simple one. The key lies in the fact that there is a conflict of interest between a great number of nations on two issues: one, coastal-fishing rights and two, freedom of navigation in the 12-