

Howard Green Adding Ginger at Geneva

Howard Green had been Conservative MP for Vancouver-Quadra for 24 years, and was serving as both House Leader and Minister of Defence Production in the Diefenbaker government, when the Minister of External Affairs, Sidney Smith, died. Green was appointed External Affairs Minister in June 1959 and held the post until the Conservatives lost the election in April 1963. His years at External matched a period of intense and hopeful activity in disarmament negotiations and, as Mr. Green recalled in a lively interview in 1986 (when he was 90), "disarmament certainly was one of my main interests. We were also great believers in the United Nations."

Asked in that interview whether his service in France with the 54th Kootenays during the First World War was his first experience in international affairs, Green replied dryly: "Well, it was an experience—I don't know about the international affairs part!" However, it bred in him a deep concern for a secure peace and, in the 1950s, dismay at the accelerating arms race. As External Affairs Minister, Green was appalled by the resumption of nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, and in July 1962, he exclaimed at the Geneva disarmament conference: "Mr. Chairman, all this testing is sheer madness—polluting the air [that] human beings must breathe, endangering the lives of generations yet unborn, and possibly leading to the destruction of civilization." Trained as a lawyer, Green put a great deal of personal effort in to these disarmament negotiations, in Geneva and in New York.

In brief, Nikita Khrushchev had prompted this negotiating activity by laying a plan for "general and complete disarmament" before the General Assembly in September 1959. In December, Howard Green brought Lt.-Gen. "Tommy" Burns back from the Middle East, where he had commanded the United Nations Emergency Force, to be Canada's disarmament negotiator in Geneva. The 10-nation Disarmament Committee (5 NATO, 5 Warsaw Pact countries) met in March 1960 to discuss Soviet and U.S. plans for three-stage disarmament, but talks broke off in June. After John Kennedy became U.S. President, negotiations resumed between the superpowers, and Valerian Zorin and John McCloy produced a Joint Statement of Agreed Principles in March 1961.

During the next General Assembly session, the United States produced detailed plans for nuclear and conventional disarmament, and the U.S.S.R. tabled a draft treaty. Under pressure from the Soviet Union, the Geneva committee was enlarged with the addition of eight non-aligned countries (Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, India, Burma, United Arab Republic, Ethiopia and Nigeria). This Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) began meeting on March 14, 1962, and met 234 times in the next three-and-one-half years. Howard Green addressed the conference during its first week, and following are excerpts from that speech, which he typically entitled "Mankind's Greatest Problem—Disarmament":

"It is obvious that the main purpose of the United Nations is to keep the peace. Of course, under present conditions, that means that disarmament becomes the most important problem of the United Nations, and that forum will always have the main responsibility for bringing about disarmament.