



## The First Twenty Years: G78 Peace Policies in the 80s

*by Tim Creery*

### **Toward a comprehensive foreign policy**

The Group of 78 grew out of the conviction of the founders that Canada was too embedded in the confrontation of the Cold War. They wanted the country to be more innovative in seeking co-operative international policies that would shift the emphasis to arms reduction and disarmament, fair global governance through the United Nations and its institutions, and an equitable global economic order to reduce the appalling gap between rich and poor. The founders were alarmed by such Cold War developments as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the introduction of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, and the rising turmoil in the Middle East.

The first policy conference was held in the fall of 1984 and included a tribute from founding member Gordon Fairweather to Andrew Brewin, who had died since the founding of the Group. The gathering was held at Stoney Lake, near Peterborough. Both that year and the next, the Stoney Lake conferences produced general policy statements updating, and expanding on the 1981 statement.

The 1984 document, *A Foreign Policy for the 80's*, called for a moratorium on all space weapons, steps to reduce nuclear weapons, renunciation by NATO of first use of nuclear weapons, efforts to constrain the arms trade, and support for an international satellite monitoring agency. The Group started stressing the importance of measures to improve the economic outlook of the poorer countries, including what turned out to be the losing battle to improve Canadian foreign aid. With separate sections on human rights, and the environment and the oceans, the conference document illustrated the Group's intention to deal with the whole sweep of foreign policy, "linking peace and security with the building of an equitable world order". The document was signed by 148 people.

The 1985 conference statement, *To Combine Our Efforts*, commended the Mulroney government for declining to participate in President Reagan's "Star Wars" project. It said that "security is a by-product of global and economic well-being rather than a goal to be attained by the application of power". In August of 1985 the Group had published a magazine-size book of articles by members, *Canada and the World; National Interest and Global Responsibility*, responding to the government's green paper on foreign policy. Founding Member John Polanyi wrote in an article debunking Star Wars, "To whatever

extent one side has defences, to that same extent the opposing side can be considered to have been disarmed."

The 1985 conference statement once again broadened the scope of Group of 78 policy interests, but continued to give priority in the Cold War context to the nuclear threat. Members such as King Gordon, Escott Reid, Dr. Polanyi, George Ignatieff, Major-General (ret) Leonard Johnson, Ernie Regehr, Anatol Rapoport, and Murray Thomson - to mention only a few - brought much experience or expert knowledge to bear on the issues of disarmament and arms control.

The conference report dwelt also on the importance of stimulating public interest in foreign affairs, the importance of UNESCO in global cultural co-operation, and the desirability of ratifying the Law of the Sea convention. In a section on "Peacemaking and Human Rights", the statement dealt extensively with measures to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, then turned to the issue of opposing military solutions and outside intervention in Central America. Development co-operation, crushing poverty in Africa, and the environment were also treated at some length. The statement was signed by 89 participants at the conference.

### **Elaborating the theme of common security**

By the 1986 conference, members had something of a summer-camp spirit, complete with a song starting, "Stoney Lakers here we come ..." That year's conference theme, *Canada and Common Security: the Assertion of Sanity*, became the title of the G78's next collection of articles, published early in 1987. King Gordon, who in these years was co-chair of the G78 along with Ann Gertler, said in his introduction to the book that common security implies "a viable and realistic alternative to the adversarial relationship". It is "the principle of collective action to maintain peace, solve economic problems and protect human rights". The book concluded with a summary statement of the conference by Penny Sanger, executive secretary of the Group at that time, in which she recalled Ann Gertler's opening statement: "The war system remains intact and will do so until we have something to replace it."

Returning to Stoney Lake for the last time in 1987, the conference had as theme *The United Nations, a Security Alternative for Canada*. Among its resolutions was one deploring the continuation of cruise-missile testing over Canada. At the suggestion of Joanna Miller a working group was established on an alternative defence policy for Canada. The report of the conference welcomed reductions in Cold War tensions and deplored the hawkish tone of the Mulroney government's defence white paper, with its projection of 10 to 12 nuclear-powered submarines for Canada. (They never slid down the ways.) The conference called for a phase-out of defence production incentives, the complete separation of Canadian forces from NORAD, the purchase by Canada of all parts of the North Warning System on Canadian soil and their allocation to the Canadian Air Defence Command. It wanted more attention to UN peace operations and better training for Canadian participation in them.

Meanwhile, an idea originating among G78 members, particularly the late Professor Maxwell Cohen, at the 1984 conference, had come impressively to life in the summer in Ottawa: an international conference of top lawyers and scientists considering the constraints of law on nuclear weapons.

In 1988 the annual policy conference was held at Lake Couchiching on the topic *International Trends: Potential for Change*. Earlier in the year the Group had issued a statement urging the demilitarization of the Arctic; it also joined with a number of other peace groups in an open letter on disarmament; the others were Operation Dismantle, Project Ploughshares, Veterans Against Nuclear Arms, and the World Federalists of Canada..

### **Defence policy must support foreign policy**

In 1989 the Group finally brought out its *Alternative Defence Policy* paper, a measured rebuttal of the confrontational thesis of the 1987 defence white paper. The document is notable for an introduction by King Gordon, among the last things he wrote before his death early in 1989. Gordon had been disturbed by the narrow focus and harsh tone of Canada's defence policy statements compared with the broader vision and moderate tone of foreign policy statements. One of his paragraphs stands up today as a brief prescription for Canadian defence policy:

"An alternative defence policy for Canada must be both consistent with and supportive of Canada's foreign policy. It must be designed to enhance common security in the international community, to fulfill our commitments under the United Nations Charter, and to assist in the peaceful resolution of disputes. It must support international peacekeeping efforts - as previously demonstrated with great distinction - and encourage international co-operation to enhance stability and justice in a global society."

The paper itself called for "an expanded role for Canada in both peacekeeping and peacemaking", and for more educational and training opportunities in peacekeeping and peacemaking. Greater emphasis should be placed on capability for disaster relief. It reaffirmed the policies adopted at other conferences. It said, "The arms trade is the contemporary analogue of the slave trade. It should be regarded as a crime against humanity and abolished." That had to be a distant goal, it admitted, but we should make a start by such steps as an international arms register, and an end to defence production sharing with the United States. The 1989 conference was held at the University of Ottawa. On the topic *Canada and Her Neighbours: the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.*

In 1990, the Group held the first of the conferences at Econiche in the Gatineau, which continued through the nineties. That year, too, a dinner was held in tribute to J. King Gordon, with Gordon Fairweather and Marie-Hélène Courtemanche-Boyle as co-chairs.

Looking back over the G78's formative years we can see a constant and energetic effort to broaden and deepen its elaboration of a peace-centered foreign policy. The scale of the effort proved to be more than the resources of the Group could support, but that is a different story, though very much the same story as the G78's problems today. In the meantime, the ending of the Cold War and flowering of the Global Age have brought many changes along the lines the Group had urged, retained some features it deplored, and introduced new concerns or heightened others, such as human rights, local conflict, and environmental quality.