

control cholera, or try to save the international banking system. It is all that which is at stake when one lightly says that the UN is a bust just because one doesn't like much of what is said in the Assembly.

"The Assembly is a meeting place for representatives of sovereign states. It is they, not the UN, which have difficulty agreeing on actions and attitudes. And it is no wonder, given the economic and social diversity and historic enmities of a world which has only recently begun to submit to international self-discipline.

"It is easy to be discouraged (and smart to be cynical), but one can find grounds for optimism in the remarkable extension since 1946 of international law and regulation through the vast network of committees and subcommittees in the UN system. Many of them, of course, are quite useless, but enough are so successful that we are unaware of them and take their good works for granted.

"In the Assembly, as in all international institutions, there is the constant struggle for consensus. Rules and regulations cannot be imposed by force. That is the major lesson we have learned in 40 years. They have to be accepted because states recognize, as they do increasingly, that they need rules. The mutual advantages of recognized fishing zones or controls on nuclear testing eventually become obvious.

"I have never shared the view that a beautiful UN was set up in 1945, which fell apart or was betrayed by its members. The Charter was a noble effort to get consensus among the powers in accordance with the emotions at the end of a terrible war, but it was flawed by understandable illusions—that a system of collective security could be universal on this unruly earth, that 'aggression' could be easily and unanimously identified, that revived prosperity in the rich countries would 'trickle down' to the poor.

"What has ensued is four decades of learning experience. We have worked our way through the illusion and also the rapture, one reason why the UN has a bad name in popular parlance. We cannot cope easily with the contradictory realities of the world, and it is tempting to blame the structure.

"However, it is politically impossible to change the Charter, and we don't need to. The UN provides the necessary instruments to keep the peace and move towards a better economic order if we can achieve sufficient agreement on how to use them. It is the agenda that should occupy our attention, not the concoction of some new improved UN.

"For one accustomed to the earlier Assembly, the most striking difference is, of course, the size and diversity of the membership. Having sat behind Paul Martin in the 1955 Assembly when he successfully led a small power revolt against John Foster Dulles and friends to open up the membership, I have often had to ask myself if we had been wise in releasing the floodgates. There are disadvantages in having tiny powers present; but they have been greatly exaggerated. The UN could not have survived if it had continued to represent less than half the world's population. The vote of Burkina Faso may in principle be equal to that of the superpowers; but it is obvious, as one watches the voting, whose vote counts. The UN is beset with checks and balances. The Assembly is best regarded as a useful poll of world opinion.