

# Arrears put U.N. on financial edge

by John Watson

The United Nations is close to bankruptcy. The organization's problems, and how to solve them, are the most pressing issues the General Assembly will deal with in the current session that began Sept. 17. The financial squeeze has been developing for a long time — it was the main topic in the last session of the Assembly as well.

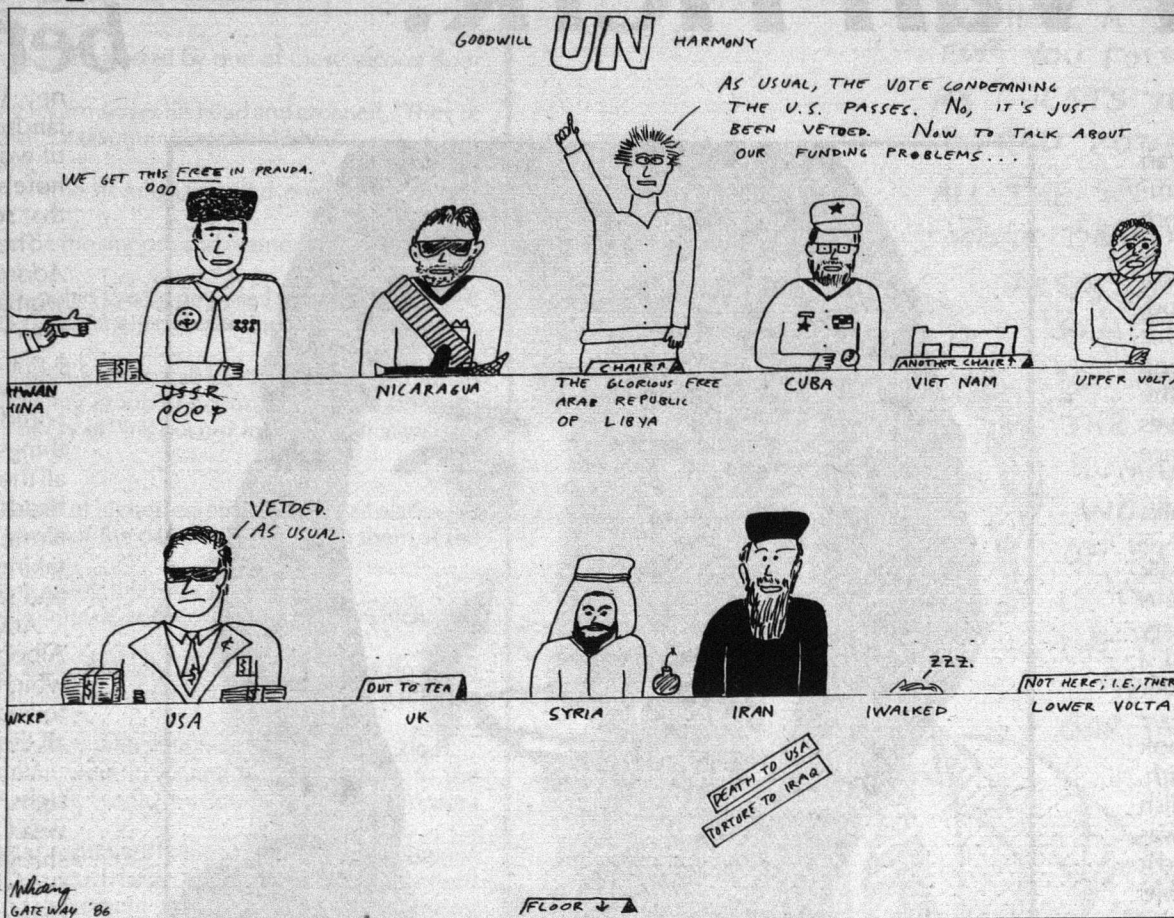
As Canadian Ambassador to the U.N. Stephen Lewis said in a speech to the General Assembly on April 30, "We've got an annual budget so tiny relative to the needs and issues with which it must deal as to invite universal derision, and we can't — or won't — meet it."

The U.N. operates on money collected from member nations. The members are required by the United Nations' Charter to pay their assessment. Unfortunately, the U.N. has little recourse if nations fail to make their payments, or to make them on time.

And that is the situation the U.N. finds itself in now. In fact, at the beginning of this year, about \$240 million in assessments remained unpaid.

That figure is more than one quarter of the U.N.'s budget for 1986 — \$846.4 million.

Not all of this money is from this year's assessments. A number of countries have been in arrears for some time. Countries have, in the



past, withheld a portion of their bill to protest actions with which they disagreed.

"One very good way of pressuring an organization is to threaten to

cut off its money," said First Secretary to the Canadian Mission to the U.N., Ado Vaher.

The Soviet Union has, in the past, refused to partake in peace-

keeping forces and also refused to fund them. The United States withholds funds for activities related to the Palestinian problem and The Second Decade to Combat Racism

and Racial Discrimination project, among others. South Africa has not paid a total of \$24.5 million; it has said it will pay when it is allowed to participate in the General Assembly. South Africa has not been allowed to do so since 1974 because of its policy of apartheid. Canada is one of the few countries entirely paid up.

The \$240 million shortage has been building for almost two decades. But the current crisis was brought on abruptly last year when the U.S. Congress slashed about \$70 million from the American contribution. The U.S. is by far the largest financial contributor to the U.N. Twenty-five per cent (the maximum any member state can pay according to the U.N. charter) of the budget is provided by the U.S.

Up until recently, the Reagan administration was highly critical of the U.N. organization. In addition to the recent funding cuts, the Americans pulled out of UNESCO in 1984. The United States, along with most of the other major donors, voted against the adoption of this year's budget.

But Washington may be changing its approach. "What seems to be the intent of the administration right now is to turn the Congress around," said Vaher.

In the meantime, the organization has spent a lot of time trying to find ways of spending a lot less money.

The last session of the General Assembly supported \$60 million in spending cuts. Provided payments are forthcoming, the U.N. should be financially stable until January 1987.

The current session of the Assembly will hear a reform package from an 18 member High-Level group formed in 1985 to review the administrative and financial matters of the U.N.

Ambassador Lewis concluded his speech by asking "...are we to allow something called arrears to prejudice the capacity of the U.N. to create a more sane and civilized planet?"

That is the question the U.N. is currently debating.

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