

The subsequent history of the South West Africa issue in the United Nations did not bear out this promising beginning. At the next session of the Assembly, in the spring of 1967, no agreement could be reached despite intensive efforts; 30 states, mostly Western, abstained on the resolution which established a United Nations Council for South West Africa. When the subject came before the twenty-second session of the Assembly in the autumn of 1967, the deadlock remained unbroken, there was little negotiation, and most of the Western group again abstained, although the resolution itself was supported by 92 member states. This was an example of what might be called the "majority variety" of group diplomacy, although in fact it is hardly appropriate to speak of diplomacy if there is little or no attempt to conciliate differences of view between important groups of states.

The Assembly's attempt last summer to find a basis for the solution of the Middle East crisis was also an example of the failure of group diplomacy at the United Nations. In this case, the failure did not arise from a lack of negotiation but from an inability to reconcile, despite heroic efforts, two conflicting positions which were held by approximately equal numbers of states (on the one side the Latin American group, most of the Western European-and-Others group and almost half the African group -- on the other side the Eastern European group, most of the Asian group and over half the African group). The task of persuading the parties and their great-power supporters to make concessions on this issue could only have been achieved on one of two conditions: either an agreement between the United States and the U.S.S.R. about the elements of a solution which they would then try to persuade the parties to accept, or agreement on a "grass-roots" resolution which would reflect through its co-sponsorship world public opinion. Both methods were tried but neither succeeded and, as you will recall, the Assembly had to adjourn without adopting a resolution on the fundamental issues at stake.

Suggestions have been made from time to time for changes in the procedures of the General Assembly, some of which would imply Charter amendment, designed to adjust the principle of sovereign equality, or one-nation-one-vote, to the discrepancies in the influence and power of member states. It has been pointed out, however, that the Assembly is not a parliament but a diplomatic meeting. A parliament can pass legislation by majority vote. The Assembly can in most cases adopt only recommendations by majority vote. Recommendations addressed to member states will not achieve their ends unless they obtain the backing of powerful and influential members, and even then wide co-operation is by no means assured.

Of course, the Security Council is the United Nations organ primarily responsible for taking action and the members of the Assembly can always explain the lack of practical results to particular recommendations by the refusal of the Security Council or its permanent members to agree. But it is not satisfactory for the Assembly to make repeated recommendations which are ignored or forgotten. Either the process I have called group diplomacy must be made to work better than it has (and this can only happen if the leading member states are prepared to make appropriate compromises), or some institutional innovation may be desirable to facilitate negotiation. I do not think that proposals for weighted voting of one kind or another are practical at the present time, nor am I convinced that this system would be desirable even if it were practical.