

The United Nations General Assembly

TWENTY-SECOND SESSION — THE SECOND SIX WEEKS (1)

Plenary

In addition to voting on resolutions recommended by the main committees, plenary sessions also debate and vote on items directly. Plenary has so far concluded debate on two items.

The first of these, the admission of Communist China (somewhat contentiously entitled "Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations") is a perennial of UN debate, and familiar positions were defended with predictable arguments. The "important question" resolution (as a result of which a resolution on the substantive issue requires a two-thirds majority for adoption) was again passed, Canada voting in favour, while both substantive resolutions were defeated. One resolution, sponsored by Albania, would have seated the People's Republic of China and expelled the Republic of China; the other, sponsored by Italy, called for a study group to re-examine the whole question.

Canada abstained from voting on the first resolution since, while it met the Canadian desire to see the People's Republic of China participate in the UN, it deprived the Republic of China of the representation to which it had an equal right. Canada voted for the second resolution because it seemed to promise a different, and possibly fruitful, approach to the issue.

The second item, on the need to "expedite the drafting of a definition of aggression . . .", was brought up by the Soviet Union. Defining aggression, it is said, would facilitate the identification of aggressors and thus strengthen the United Nations' ability to restore and maintain peace. The Canadian view, based on past experience (the search for such a definition has continued for over 40 years), is that it will be virtually impossible to reach consensus on a definition, though studies have clarified many of the intrinsic difficulties of the subject. One of these is that most of the proposed definitions have themselves contained undefined terms. Another problem is that a definition enumerating situations which would qualify as aggression would not be comprehensive, while a general definition would do nothing more than duplicate the provisions of the Charter. Moreover, it is possible that an aggressor could justify his acts by arguing that they did not fall within the definition. The Charter leaves it to the competent organs of the UN to decide what constitutes

(1) See the December issue for the first six weeks of the session. A concluding report will appear in the February 1968 issue.