

# Paul Martin

## Breaking the Deadlock on Membership

■ One of Canada's most significant acts at the United Nations, in more than 40 years of membership, was the initiative it took, and exhausting effort it made, during the General Assembly session of September to December 1955, to break the deadlock over new members. During the first decade only nine new members had been added to the 51 countries who had originally signed the Charter in 1945: Afghanistan, Iceland, Sweden and Thailand in 1946; Pakistan and Yemen in 1947; Burma in 1948; Israel in 1949; and Indonesia in 1950. Then came the Korean War, and one or another of the permanent members of the Security Council stood ready to veto new applicants for ideological reasons. (Under Articles 4 and 18 of the Charter, an application has to receive a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly "upon the recommendation of the Security Council.")

Various attempts, first by an 11-member committee and then by a committee of good offices led by Peru, were made to break the deadlock over the next five years. Finally, in 1955, Canada found a way. Paul Martin, who was then the minister of Health and Welfare and who later served as External Affairs minister (from 1963 to 1968), was the principal actor; he often led the Canadian delegation at the UN in place of the then External Affairs minister, Lester B. Pearson. He hoped to win support for a package deal embracing 18 prospective members. The strongest opposition came from the United States, Britain, France and Taiwan, all possessing veto power at that time. The Soviet Union proved to be the most supportive permanent member. Agreement came only after the applications of the two states raising the most controversy—Outer Mongolia and Japan—were deferred. (They were separately approved in 1961 and 1956, respectively.)

In the agreement of December 14, 1955, the following 16 states were accepted as members: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Ceylon, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Libya, Nepal, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

In the second volume of his memoirs, *A Very Public Life* (Deneau, 1985), Paul Martin sums up:

"Looking back, I am struck by the importance of our accomplishment, despite some of the most difficult and disagreeable negotiations ever undertaken between Canada and its major allies. The admission of new members in 1955 began a trend that has radically altered the composition and work of the United Nations. Because it signalled the beginning of the end of the great powers' stranglehold, some have argued that it also weakened the United Nations. The UN can only meet its long-range purpose, I still affirm, if it truly represents the world community. The growing number of members has certainly not made debate easier, but it has ensured that in the long run the United Nations has a chance to become a more effective institution."

In a conversation during 1986, Paul Martin told the story afresh, with new details:

"It was one of these perchance things. In June 1955, at the meeting to commemorate the San Francisco Conference 10 years earlier, Pearson had made a speech in which there was a general reference to his regret that so many sovereign powers of consequence were not members of the United