

ECOSOC

When I spoke here last year, I suggested that the Economic and Social Council should be given a more significant role. At its spring and summer sessions, the Council considers a bewildering variety of issues. It has even less success in what should be its central task — setting priorities and co-ordinating the work of this family of organizations in the economic, social, cultural, educational health and related fields. My delegation believes the Council should have more frequent and shorter sessions. At each of these it could deal thoroughly with one group of subjects, covering all of its agenda over a two-year period. From time to time the Council should also meet at ministerial level to review major economic or social questions when policy considerations justify participation at this level. In all UN organs, I welcome new practices of informal consultation and negotiations through contact groups that help to turn the UN from a deliberative body into a real negotiating forum.

Specialized Agencies

We must also work for an improvement in the work of the Specialized Agencies. Many of these have a distinguished record. But our method for controlling the system as a whole has been unsatisfactory. We have been good at devising new programs, but less so at identifying ones that are obsolete or at preventing duplication. One result has been an escalation of costs. A few years ago, one of my predecessors complained to the Assembly that the assessed budgets of the UN family of organizations had doubled in ten years. Now they have more than doubled in five. We shall have to ensure that budgets are kept down, and that money is spent only on subjects that have the highest priority.

A second problem with the Specialized Agencies has been the extent to which they have been turned from their main purposes to deal with the political issues that are the responsibility of this Assembly. Canada is determined to resist this process. We have been particularly concerned about the ILO (International Labour Organization). We value the Organization for its record of achievement on human rights and its unique contribution to the UN system as a whole. We are anxious to preserve the impartiality and authority of its procedures so that a member state will not be condemned without impartial investigation. I believe that many members share our views and will work together for this purpose.

These proposals deal principally with improvements in our procedures. If implemented (and I confess that I am by no means sanguine that they will be), they would put us in a better position to deal with the important issues; but the complexity of the issues themselves will not be lessened.

Economic issues

Although they manifest themselves in a variety of troubling ways, including open conflicts, it is now apparent that the principal concerns of most members are, in fact, economic. The UN and its agencies have their work cut out for them if we are to move closer to a more just and equitable world economic order. The barriers to success are enormous as unemployment and inflation continue to plague even the wealthiest countries. Unless a spirit of reasonableness prevails, unless demands and responses are tailored to present economic realities, I must caution that, even in Canada, which is far from being the least-generous of the developed countries, pressures will develop to focus on our own considerable problems, even to the exclusion of the international consequences. I need hardly tell you that we are not alone in this difficulty.