

In those years Canada helped build consensus around the concept of "zero real growth" (i.e. status quo plus inflation) and sponsored the "Blue Book" proposals prepared in External Affairs, which set out schemes to standardize budget accounting, establish a more realistic co-relation between the UN's programs and the money actually available for them, greater built-in adaptability to changing conditions, and the idea of reward for early payment of dues. Never a best-seller at the UN because of its highly technical and detailed format, some of its better suggestions have nevertheless emerged in useful ways throughout the system.

In 1987 a special commission launched an exercise to put some backbone into ECOSOC, which had fallen far short of the mandate set out for it in the Charter. Canada and other middle powers were active in this exercise which in the end did not succeed. Here something a bit beyond process tinkering was contemplated, but consensus could not be reached. (There were even doubts among some Canadian officials about what the effects of a stronger ECOSOC might be.) More successful were Canada's efforts to promote the advancement of women in the 80's and at the World Conference on Women at Nairobi in 1988 its representatives pressed successfully to have the "forward-looking strategies" incorporated across the board into all UN programs.

Canada's Reform Style: The Old

Thus Canada has been engaged from the beginning one way or another in attempts to make the UN work better, but apart from the major innovations of 1955-56, has done so in evolutionary and non-dramatic ways, acting in concert with like-minded countries like the Nordics, Australia and New Zealand and as many members of the WEOG and the more progressive East Europeans as possible. The time did not seem right for major restructuring, so Canada's approach has remained until recently fairly conservative, that of the helpful fixer.

The New

Now, however, is the moment for Canada to push for more radical reform in the UN system. The changed political climate has provided the opportunity, but there is a danger that the historic moment may be lost if there is not early action. And looking to the 50th anniversary, there are little more than two years to get it underway. Though obviously not able to do this alone, buoyed by its long UN tradition and a clear assessment of its interests as well as its unique advantages, Canada should form strategic alliances, not only with the more familiar allies, but also with important members of what used to be the G 77, many of whom will need to be persuaded and reassured. This is a far from easy task, but without them any reform agenda will be doomed.

Canada, as possibly no other country, has the acceptability, the access and the opportunity. It follows, therefore, that we also have the moral responsibility.