

Recap of 29th General Assembly: United Nations turning-point?

By Alex I. Inglis

The twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations was both difficult and acrimonious, yet it held forth promise of revitalization. The visible coalescence of the non-aligned and developing countries into a solid bloc with numerical superiority was in many ways the most noticeable feature of the session as it had been at the sixth special session held earlier in the year. This bloc drew together sufficient voting strength to carry resolutions opposed by the Western industrialized countries — indeed, on occasion to carry resolutions over the combined opposition of the West and the Soviet-bloc countries. As a result, the Assembly, seized of some of the most contentious issues in recent international affairs, brought forward a number of solutions that were unacceptable to important elements. Indeed, some of the resolutions adopted showed little consideration for the practical problems of implementation.

Although much of the twenty-ninth Assembly's work failed to reflect the continuing realities of traditional world power, it did accurately reflect recent changes in the international scheme. The accumulation of wealth by the oil-producing countries, the availability of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries) as a vehicle for political consultation, the concerted efforts of the preceding year to unite the non-aligned and the promise of aid from the Arab oil-producers to the developing world all combined to bring a high degree of unity to the Third World. These factors, coupled with African support for the Arab position on the Palestinian question in return for Arab support for the African campaign against the Republic of South Africa, made it possible for the non-aligned to exercise their predominant voting strength with a high degree of unity and consistency.

The session began routinely with the admission of three new members — Bangladesh, Grenada and Guinea-Bissau (the third being of special interest as the first of the former Portuguese territories to be

admitted to UN membership) — and the election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the Algerian Foreign Minister, to the Presidency of the Assembly. The opening general debate was, as usual, adorned with statements by heads of state, heads of government and foreign ministers. Included in this group for the first time were U.S. President Ford and Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan MacEachen. Mr. MacEachen delivered to the Assembly a Canadian statement on the broad issues facing the international community. Later he returned to New York for the Palestinian debate and set forth Canada's views on the Middle East.

Following the routine opening of the Assembly, proceedings began to reflect the force of emergent Third World power. Among the issues and debates that highlighted the session were the Palestine question, the *de facto* suspension of South Africa from participation in the twenty-ninth Assembly, Cyprus, Korea, Cambodia, the Echeverria Charter and the concluding debate on the strengthening of the role of the UN. The most notable were the Palestine debate and the related acceptance of Yasser Arafat as spokesman for the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), and the recognition of the PLO as the representatives of the Palestinian people. On October 14, the Assembly adopted by an affirmative vote of 105, including a number of Western delegations (France, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Ireland), a resolution inviting the PLO to participate in the plenary meetings of the Assembly on the Palestine question as "the representative of the Palestinian people". Canada abstained with 19 others, and explained that it preferred not to prejudice who

*Acceptance
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Mr. Inglis is Editor of International Perspectives. The views expressed in this article are purely his own, however, and are not intended to reflect the policy of the Department or to state an editorial position for this magazine.