

with such problems, is too often on the sidelines as far as many major issues are concerned."

In this third report (September 1984) the Secretary-General was more positive about the UN and its accomplishments. But he was far from sanguine, and he asked, "Why has there been a retreat from multilateralism at a time when actual developments both in relation to world peace and to the world economy would seem to demand their strengthening."

Some real failures

The litany of problems and complaints about the UN is long and familiar. Collective security, as envisaged at San Francisco, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" has not worked out as the founders had hoped. The Security Council, the main organ for conflict resolution and enforcement of the peace, has often been hamstrung by the veto power of the permanent members. The General Assembly, whose members now number 159, is too often the scene of polemic debate instead of reasoned discussion and the search for compromise. Resolutions passed by the Assembly are often ignored by member governments, becoming almost meaningless.

In terms of substance there are a number of perennial items on the agenda of the UN on which there seems to be little progress. The major ones are: the Middle East, including the relationship between Israel and its neighbors, and the question of Palestine; and the policy of apartheid of the government of South Africa, and the related question of the independence of Namibia. These problems are unsolved; the war between Iran and Iraq continues; countries have resorted to force in the Falklands/Malvinas, Central America, Grenada, Africa, Afghanistan, Kampuchea; economic disparities between North and South are increasing; the arms race continues unabated; human rights violations remain. All this is often laid at the door of the UN. It is assumed that all these troubles are somehow the fault of the UN, that if only the UN were a more effective organization, nirvana would be with us. Perez de Cuellar, in his three reports, has come to grips with the fact that these situations are still with us, and are, in their cumulative effect, more life-threatening than ever. But, he has said, instead of making the UN the scapegoat for the sorry state of our world, let us try together to *use* the institution as a means of solving these problems. As a start, let us take a few small steps to make the organization more effective.

Some big changes

Difficulties with the UN system have been appearing for some time, a natural development for an institution which was conceived during World War II and born at its conclusion. One need only think of the fantastic rate of change since 1945 in all areas of human activity to realize what a different world it is now. Scientific and technological developments provide the most obvious examples. In 1945, for instance, it was a major undertaking for delegates from some fifty countries to get to San Francisco. Today, that would be quite simple. The change which has most affected the UN has been