

UN: A Statement of Common Purpose, Not Just a Name

The 1980s were, on the whole, difficult for the United Nations. Canadians, who have supported the organization throughout its troubles, welcome the opportunities for strengthening the institution that are offered by the thaw in the Cold War and by the rediscovered usefulness of the UN in dealing with the situations in Afghanistan, Namibia and Central America as well as with the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. But how are we going to respond to the challenges of this new era? External Affairs Minister Joe Clark, in his address to the General Assembly last autumn, aptly summed up what must be done:

"We are entering an era where the words of the UN Charter must cease to be goals to which we aspire; they must become descriptions of our common action. And the term 'United Nations' cannot simply be the name of our institution; it must become a statement of our common purpose."

At its best, the UN is inherently an ungainly machine. An unglamorous but vitally important task is to maintain pressure for constructive reform, both in the practices and procedures of the various legislative and negotiating bodies and in the secretariats. At the same time, we should use our influence behind the scenes, and publicly if necessary, to persuade governments to meet their financial and other obligations. Many developing nations view "reform" as simply a buzzword for the efforts of rich countries to reduce their obligations. There is more than a grain of truth in that interpretation.

Canada's first target should be the United States. Unfortunately, neither the administrative reforms adopted by the General Assembly nor the recent demonstrations of the value of the UN in dealing with local conflicts have yet convinced Congress that the U.S. should meet its financial arrears. This seriously limits the UN's ability to fulfil its commitments. The White House has recommended that the time has come to pay up, but Congress so far has appropriated only a small portion of what is owed. Here is a job our Members of Parliament might take on: persuade their American counterparts that it is in their own interest to remove this impediment.

The Security Council

The UN Security Council is, and will continue to be, effective only to the degree permitted by the major powers on one hand and the collectivity of the Third World on the other. But the Council has shown repeatedly that it can perform a very valuable function in "multilateralizing", and thereby making more acceptable, arrangements to stop or prevent conflict.

For a non-permanent member, Council service is both a responsibility and a privilege. Canada has an obligation to take its turn, with other members of the regional group to which it is assigned, which means gaps of about a decade in our service. But as a country better able than many to contribute effectively to the Council's work, we should not hesitate to press its case at the appropriate time.

For the staff of our mission in New York and their back-up in Ottawa, the day-to-day work in preparing and tending to Council affairs is a grind. Notwithstanding the publicity generated when we are running for election, the opportunities for dramatic initiatives and interventions are rare. Indeed, such occasions are usually the outcome of failed negotiations. But there are signs of possible change. The Council always has resisted efforts by Canada and some other members to make it more *proactive* in forestalling potential conflicts before they erupt into open warfare. So far, it has been willing only to be *reactive*, but the five permanent Council members' recent agreement on Cambodia is an interesting and hopeful development.

A Council responsibility which deserves more attention is the way that the candidate for Secretary-General is recommended. From the outset, the permanent Council members have opted for those they believe will cause a minimum of difficulty for policies which might obstruct attainment of national aims. They were fooled when they chose Dag Hammarskjöld but have not repeated that mistake. There also are the political considerations associated with the objectives and ambitions of regional groups, which are prepared to throw

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their weight behind a favourite, regardless of whether that person is the best available. That is not good enough. Canada should capitalize on the current political climate by supporting a "planned search" for the best possible candidates. Admittedly, such an initiative will face heavy weather in the maze of inter- and intra-group politics. But the prize would be worth it. At the very least, it should be useful in deterring the aspirations of unsuitable candidates.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly will certainly continue to function as a forum in which all nations can express their opinions for the world to hear. The value, indeed the indispensability of the constant pressures induced by Assembly debates is indisputable. It is only when nations come to terms with the intractability of these issues that they move toward negotiated solutions.

I believe that as we approach the 21st century, the substantive agenda of the UN and its associated agencies are in a period of transition. The problems of the environment, the world economy, the consequences of the information explosion, the burden of defence expenditures to the detriment of social programmes, and the terrible discrepancies in the living conditions of peoples around the globe, are going to be seen as the most pressing problems affecting our security.

The developed nations have a virtual monopoly on the resources and technologies necessary to take up this challenge, but the active co-operation of the Third World is essential. For example, we need only look to the consequences for the whole world of the destruction of the tropical rain forests in Latin America.

For all their faults and shortcomings, the UN and its agencies will be essential tools in enlisting co-operation in finding solutions to these problems. A priority for all of us is to generate the spirit of co-operation that will bring about managerial and administrative effectiveness as soon as possible. The reforms adopted in the last couple of years are a good beginning — but only a beginning.

Continental Drift as an Economic Reality

Canada and Mexico are involved in what Prime Minister Mulroney chose to describe at the end of his visit to Mexico City as a "new era and a fresh partnership." Coupled with the scheduled visit to Washington in June by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, it has prompted fresh speculation about the likelihood of a North American trading bloc emerging as early as 1992. The concept has its supporters and detractors in all three countries and so far it seems to be the opposition that has held sway. But there is a growing school of thought that it is simply a matter of time if Canada, the United States and Mexico are to compete against other emergent trading blocs.

Mr. Mulroney and President Salinas signed 10 bilateral agreements on a broad range of issues, including extradition, tourism and the environment. "Very practical steps that will increase contacts and co-operation," the Prime Minister said. The centrepiece, however, was a Memorandum of Understanding that is effectively a blueprint for trade and investment co-operation similar to one Mexico signed with the U.S. in 1987 and which has been used quite effectively to gain improved access to American steel and textile markets. The Canadian package differs from the American one in two distinct ways: it sets up a formal mechanism for resolving trade disputes and does not permit "quantitative" restrictions on imports from Mexico.

No Scandal in Continentalism

The following day, Mr. Mulroney pointed out that geographic reality is drawing the three North American countries closer together. "Where this emerges as a more formalized association... I don't know," he conceded. "But I wouldn't be scandalized at the prospect." And it didn't necessarily stop at the border with Central America. "Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela — these are going to be economic giants of the next century, economic powerhouses, so it is to the advantage of the U.S. and Canada and other trading partners to begin building bridges, building trading instruments." His administration will be watching Mexican-American sectoral trading discussions "like a hawk" be-

cause Canada has "no intention of being left out of anything." International Trade Minister John Crosbie subsequently tried to curb speculation about where this all might lead, saying "we are not planning ourselves any discussions pertaining to a free trade agreement between us and Mexico."

Nevertheless, there are President Salinas' impending talks with President George Bush to consider. The Mexican leader is emphatically seeking "closer commercial ties" with Canada and the U.S. in a world in which huge regional markets are being created. "We don't want to be left out of any of those regional markets," he says. However, like Mr. Mulroney, he must balance the need for foreign investment against the political reality of dealing with economic nationalists. While Mexico City and Washington are inarguably closer than ever to negotiation of a comprehensive trade pact, it is all relative. "Only very preliminary," says Margaret Tutwiler of the U.S. State Department, possibly under instructions not to steal either leader's thunder before the June summit. And, even though the U.S. has begun examining the legal requirements for a possible initiation of preliminary formal talks at Mexico's request, the latter's embassy in Washington will cautiously say only that it cannot "confirm" that a free trade deal would be established. Jaime Serra Puche, Mexico's Minister of Trade and Industrial Development, doesn't exactly deny the possibility but is just as insistent that "negotiations have not been started over any specific mechanism."

Regardless, the feeling is that where there's smoke, there's fire. Council of Canadians Chairperson Maude Barlow fears the implications. "This is part of a plan to create one economic system that goes from Canada's North down through Central America," she says. "...It would give multinationals Canada's resources, the U.S. market and Mexico's cheap labour." She suggests that Canada would have to cut wages and lower its labour and environmental standards to remain competitive. "Decisions about energy, social programmes and our economic situation won't be ours to decide." Laurent Thibault, President of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association,

tries to counter that fear, saying that any advantage that Mexico's cheap labour might yield will be offset by its generally lower education standards, poor communications and industrial infrastructure. He is positive that a U.S.-Mexico deal would create new opportunities for such value-added Canadian goods as machinery and communications hardware.

Policy Not Without Risk

Michael McCracken of the Ottawa-based consulting firm, Informatrica, leans to the Barlow side of the debate. He says Mexico and Canada could emerge as "feeder states" for the U.S. This is echoed by American trade analyst Peter Morici, who says Mexico has exported to the U.S. more and more goods of the kind that traditionally came from Canada, including electrical generation gear and industrial machinery. "The combination of added capital and technology and Mexican cheap labour could give Canada fits in the U.S. market," he says. "Canada is going to have to negotiate in parallel or be a third party at the U.S.-Mexico table."

Gordon Ritchie, the deputy Canadian negotiator on the FTA who now runs an Ottawa consulting firm, Strategicon Inc., suggests that all the speculation aside, it's possible that a U.S.-Mexico trade agreement would become reality until early in the next century. "Mexico and American will have to creep up on this thing," he says. "The U.S.-Canada deal took four years to negotiate. I wouldn't be surprised if a deal with Mexico takes 14 years." He also expects that if a deal is struck, it would be different from the one that Washington signed with Ottawa. Among other things, the disparity in per capita incomes (the latest World Bank figures in U.S. dollars put the U.S. at \$18,530, Canada at \$15,160 and Mexico at just \$1,830) would necessitate a much longer phasing in of tariff removal if some parts of the U.S. economy aren't to be left in chaos.

Mr. Mulroney may have been prescient in Mexico City when he said that Canada's relationship with the Americans' southern neighbour "is expanding in ways that could not have been foreseen even a few years ago."