

If God be for US...

William F. Buckley on the UN

By David S. Wright

The announcement that the American delegation to the twenty-eighth United Nations General Assembly in 1973 would include William F. Buckley, Jr., noted debater, author, television personality and spokesman of the political right in the United States, was greeted with enthusiasm by those familiar with his style and conscious of the impact he might have at the UN. The enthusiasm was rooted not in sympathy with Mr. Buckley's well-documented political views but in the anticipated entertainment value of his participation in the theatre of the Assembly. At minimum, it was hoped that his polished wit might bring new life to a staid and ponderous institution. *The New York Times* added to the sense of anticipation in a rare tongue-in-cheek report on the opening proceedings of the session in which it regretted the absence from the UN scene of the colourful national costumes of yesteryear but noted one exception — Mr. Buckley, resplendent in his native attire of a conservative suit, button-down collar and rep tie.

One must be somewhat sceptical regarding the initial conclusion Mr. Buckley drew on being offered the appointment that he would be able to bring his own political arguments with him to the floor of the Assembly. Regrettably, but inevitably, little was seen of William F. Buckley, Jr., the debater during the course of the twenty-eighth session. The individual delegate cannot, and presumably should not, rise above the instructions of his government and Mr. Buckley was appropriately tamed during his tenure. This

Mr. Wright is First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations in New York. He has been a foreign service officer since 1968, and served in Rome before joining Canada's UN mission in September 1972. He is a graduate of McGill and Columbia Universities and last contributed an article to International Perspectives for the May/June 1974 issue. More recently, he contributed an article on the UN University to the October issue of University Affairs. The views expressed in this article are those of the author.

must have been a considerable task, as his views on the UN (and on foreign policy in general) are, if not eccentric, then at least unique. He has been a strong opponent of United States participation in the UN and has suggested, for example (in *Cruising Speed*), that the most appropriate ambassador the United States could send to the organization would be a deaf-mute. More seriously, since the vote in 1971 to admit the People's Republic of China, he has argued that the United States should abstain from all voting at the General Assembly, because to participate in the vote involves the United States in the outcome of, and lends credence to, proceedings wherein a "hostile" majority of socialists and Third World countries is able to override American arguments with ease.

United Nations Journal: A Delegate's Odyssey provides consolation to those who had higher hopes for Mr. Buckley's UN sojourn. It is an extremely amusing book, reasonably accurate and carefully researched, and it gives a vivid picture to the outsider of the life of an American delegate at a General Assembly. To the insider, Mr. Buckley's description of his encounters with the venerable and loquacious Ambassador Baroody of Saudi Arabia would in itself make the book worth while. Most studies on the UN tend either to be excessive in their praise of the organization and its ideals, or too contemptuous of what the author considers the failure of the UN to solve international problems. Alternatively they are simply boring to read (*Hammar skjold* by Brian Urquhart is a remarkable exception). Mr. Buckley's book suffers from none of these drawbacks. He grasps at the outset what many seem to miss, that the UN literally can do no more to solve global problems than the sovereign states comprising it wish it to do. The failings of the UN are the failings of its members; the organization is simply a process for multilateral diplomacy. Mr. Buckley's scepticism and his inclination to be awed by nothing lead to a report on the UN which is interesting and plausible.

Although he does appear to have been somewhat converted by his experience at the UN, one must recall the perspective Mr. Buckley brings to an analysis of the

Buckley's initial conclusion draws scepticism