

# Jobs for Canada's next UN Ambassador

by Firdaus James Kharas

Whoever inherits the prolix title of "Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations" will assume this position this summer at a pivotal moment. Unparalleled opportunities created by the current transitional phase of multilateralism and by an enhanced role for Canada will be available to the new Ambassador.

The next Ambassador should be able to build on the superb reputation of Canada at the United Nations. Although it developed in spasms over the last forty-two years, our reputation has been greatly increased over the last three-and-a-half-years by retiring Ambassador Stephen Lewis. Canada has always sent very competent people to the United Nations, but we are emerging from a period of outstanding representation to the UN system, with dedicated internationalists Stephen Lewis and Douglas Roche in New York and J. Alan Beesley in Geneva.

This assumes that the government does not make a discreditable announcement of its intention to withdraw from the Food and Agriculture Organization, as a result of its review of that agency currently underway. It is difficult to take such a possibility seriously, given Canada's traditional foreign policy and given our stance towards that other much-aligned agency, UNESCO, under its previous director, Amadou M'Bow.

## Choosing the next Ambassador

The challenges for Brian Mulroney and Joe Clark in selecting their next representative to the UN are twofold: first, to recognize the unique juncture in history the next Ambassador will be serving in; and second, to stop underestimating our influence within multilateral forums and to appoint a person capable of energetically propelling Canadian foreign policy to new heights. This is not the time to appoint another Jean Drapeau to the UN system.

Canada's next Ambassador will have to be capable of walking a tightrope as the second North American representative on the Security Council. If all goes well, Canada should be able to beat the Greeks or the Finns for a "Western European & Other Group" slot on the Security Council for the 1989-90 period. Then, the balancing act in this age of increased coziness between Washington and Ottawa will begin.

The level of difficulty in the job will depend primarily on three factors: who the next President of the United States is, what the attitude of the cost-cutting US Congress is, and how much independence the Canadian government will allow its UN Ambassador to exercise. The prognosis of the first is difficult. Only George Bush, a former US Permanent Representative to the UN,

is seen as a possible backer, although even he has had to cater to the right in the campaign and shift his stance. There is simply no domestic constituency for the UN in the US strong enough to counter the many who find multilateral institutions easy targets.

## Ungracious host

American politics have already had a debilitating effect on the UN. If the US elects a President who favors a continuation of the early Reagan-style unilateralist foreign policy, the spillover is bound to be felt in Canada. The Canadian Ambassador on the Security Council may find being supportive of what could become two distinct facets of Canadian foreign policy — bilateral with the US and multilateral in the UN — incompatible.

Much will depend also on the mood of the Democratically-controlled Congress. A powerful group of members in both chambers seems resolved to chart a course that will result in the US abandoning its traditional position of leadership at the UN. The US already owes the UN over a hundred million dollars in arrears from the last two years because of the uncompromising position of the Congress. The rest of the world believes the US made an unofficial compact to pay its full dues if the UN undertook certain reforms, particularly in the budget process. The reforms were agreed to by the General Assembly in 1986, yet the Congress refuses to fulfill its obligations and the US debt continues to mount.

A showdown on this issue seems inevitable. At some point the members of the UN will be forced to make an historic decision. They will either have to accept that the US is not going to pay its assessed financial contribution, or reduce the US share. If the latter occurs, countries such as Canada, which are in the middle of the range of contributions, may be called upon to pay more while the UN may have to continue to undergo painful constriction. The probability is high for a deepening of the severe financial crisis the UN already finds itself in, and the potential dilemma for Canada is considerable. It could mean having to make a choice between supporting the UN or supporting the US.

## Moscow to the rescue?

Complicating any Canadian position is the emergence of support for the UN from the Gorbachev administration in Moscow. The next Canadian Ambassador to the UN may find Canada in the unwanted position of allying more with the USSR than the US, at least on the issue of multilateralism itself.

If the USSR allows the painstaking UN-mediated talks on Afghanistan to be culminated in a complete troop withdrawal, if the superpowers go on to negotiate and ratify a treaty calling for immediate radical reductions in nuclear weapons, if the USSR participates in UN peacekeeping and plays a constructive role in the Security Council, particularly on the Middle East, then the traditional roles played at the UN by the superpowers may be

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