

# Canada at the United Nations

by Peyton V. Lyon

**H**ow is Canada regarded as a participant in the United Nations? The following answer is based on nearly 200 interviews conducted within the UN's central organs located in New York in 1983. These bodies do not, of course, necessarily mirror the structure of power in the international system. They also lack, alas, the impact on global security envisaged for them in the UN Charter. The UN, however, is by far the world's most representative organization, and most of its 159 members maintain strong missions to the UN in both New York and Geneva. In this and other ways, they act as though the UN political process does matter. The organization is thus a useful vantage point for the study of international influence patterns.

This is especially true for Canada, a country that gave strong leadership in the creation of the UN, and continues to be active in it. Public enthusiasm may have waned, and also pride in the Canadian role. The huge influx of Third World members has rendered the UN less congenial to all its rich members, and the Trudeau Doctrine of 1970 projected a more self-centered approach. Despite this, Canada remains among the most reliable supporters, in word and deed, and displays more enthusiasm than do most of its allies, most notably the United States.

## The interviews

This article is not about the *facts* of the Canadian performance or attitude. Rather it is about appearances, about how other UN participants see Canada. Ninety-seven ambassadors and other members of eighty missions to the UN, representing a reasonable cross section of the regions, blocs, groups and issue areas, were interviewed in 1983. We also conducted less structured interviews with a comparable number of Secretariat officials, scholars, journalists and other UN observers. Most of the respondents, including diplomats from each of the major blocs, treated us with patience and apparent candor. We also encountered, however, a considerable amount of impatience, suspicion and evasiveness from some of the nonaligned and Warsaw Pact diplomats. Many of the responses were too diffuse to be coded and reported in meaningful statistics. On a number of interesting points, however, trends or rankings emerged that we present with considerable confidence.

It was feared that the knowledge we were Canadian would bias the response to the questions dealing with Canada. So the Canadian origin and purpose of the study

were camouflaged; three of the five interviewers were impeccably non-Canadian; and the first twenty of our twenty-eight structured questions ignored Canada. Rather they dealt with influence patterns in the UN in general. We shall discuss the response to several of these questions before focusing on Canada's UN image.

## Defining influence

One question requested an estimate, on a scale of one to seven, of twelve factors explaining influence in the UN political process. The results ranked as follows:

1. Knowledge and skill of the mission (5.6)
2. Influence (of the mission) within a group or groups (5.6)
3. Personality of the permanent representative (5.4)
4. Energetic participation (5.4)
5. Military strength (5.0)
6. Reputation for commitment to the UN (4.6)
7. Willingness to compromise (4.5)
8. Reputation for independence (4.5)
9. Assessed contribution to the UN budget (4.2)
10. Size of the (nation's) UN mission (3.9)
11. Militancy in stating position (3.6)
12. Population (3.3)

Respondents were asked whether we had overlooked any factors. Most expressed contentment, but four of the East Europeans insisted that the main explanation of influence was "having the correct position." Three other respondents stressed a more obvious oversight — membership, especially permanent, on the Security Council.

A related question elicited an evaluation of different forms of UN activity:

1. Informal lobbying (5.6)
2. Voting (5.5)
3. Discussion within groups (5.3)
4. Sponsoring resolutions (4.0) and participation in debates (4.0)

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