

Richard Foran Too Many Eggs in One Basket?

■ In 1986, the highest ranking Canadian in the United Nations Secretariat was Richard Foran, the controller. His full title is Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services, and he is a cool and cheerful person in the face of the worst fiscal crisis the UN has experienced in 40 years. In January 1986, he said calmly, "I think we will have run out of money by November," but he added that the United Nations would then be "flat broke but not bankrupt." He also pointed out that "the amounts we are talking about are not large; we're talking about an annual budget of \$800 million (U.S.), which is what New York city spends on garbage collection." Anyway, he added, "this is primarily a political, rather than a financial, problem."

Although at Queen's University he studied what seem precisely appropriate subjects for his present job—English, economics and psychology—Foran came to the hottest seat in the UN Secretariat by a roundabout route. His early jobs were in public relations, first with the Canadian Council for Crippled Children (where he worked with the wrestler "Whipper" Billy Watson), and then in New York for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine refugees. After a year of fundraising for the American University of Beirut, he rejoined the United Nations as an administrative officer. He went to Vienna for two years soon after the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) was set up there in 1967, and he became head of administration of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in its early days in Nairobi. From 1980 to 1982, he worked in Geneva as director for Programme Support and as secretary to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), before returning to New York to become controller.

Here, he talks a little about those earlier experiences in the UN system, before launching on the subject of the financial crisis with a candor unusual for someone whose role is equivalent to that of a finance minister of any UN member state.

"When I came back to the UN in 1965, there was no UNIDO; there was just a Centre for Industrial Development. Then, in 1967, UNIDO was formed, and the decision was made to go to Vienna. In 1967 and 1968, I commuted back and forth from New York, and then transferred to Vienna for two years. UNIDO is basically an aid-giving organization. We devised a recruitment system, which I thought was good, to put ultimately about 1 000 people a year into the field. When I left after two years, we were putting in 500.

"UNIDO has done some very good work. I remember, back in the 1960s, we had a huge program in Iran, helping to set up industrial estates. But UNIDO faced problems almost from the start. Like UNCTAD, it was an idea that came from the developing world. Both were perceived to be a threat to a lot of vested interests. So they did not have immaculate conceptions, either of them; and they each had mixed reviews. UNCTAD started off a bit better, because there was first-class conceptual work done there in the early days; [that work really caught] the imagination of economic professors around the world. Very few people who were getting PhDs did not take at least one