

the Soviets have offered to contribute logistic or other support. However, they made it clear that if there were opposition to their participation, especially from the Americans, they would not press the issue.

OBSERVERS OF THE SOVIET UNION have noted that in domestic politics, the new leaders are moving towards the development of the rule of law, as opposed to rule by arbitrary decree enforced by the secret police. The process of restructuring and openness requires freedom of expression and dissent, and those freedoms require rules – the rules of civil society which govern our relationships with one another. Internationally, Soviet diplomats have stressed the same thing – they say that international law should serve as the cornerstone of their own and every other state's international relations. They have asked all states to recognize the mandatory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, and have offered to consider the possibility of the ICJ playing a greater role in the settlement of disputes which have political overtones – such as arms control.

The proposals on international law illustrate dramatically the changes in the Soviet approaches to the UN: Not many years ago they strongly resisted the measuring of any Soviet policy, whether foreign or domestic, by any international standards of behaviour which they associated with Western ideals and concepts. Indeed, as Edward Luck and Toby Gati of the of the US United Nations Association point out in an article in the *Washington Quarterly*, during 1988 Gorbachev called for the

harmonization of Soviet domestic law with international norms even in such traditionally sacrosanct areas as terrorism, humanitarian issues, and protection of the environment, seeing this trend as the harbinger of the new international order envisioned in his nuclear-free world of the twenty-first century.

The "new thinking" has not taken over completely, and it co-exists with some of the old

rhetorical support for perennial anti-Western resolutions. But an important element in the new policy is the recognition that the UN in the 1980s is not the confrontational arena it was in the 1970s and that Soviet support for anti-imperialist resolutions does not fill stomachs in the Third World. Indeed, leaders of many of the poorer countries have come to see cooperation with Northern governments as essential to both economic development and regional stability. And when they look for models of economic progress they do not wish to emulate, the traditional Soviet client states of Ethiopia, Vietnam and Cuba spring immediately to mind.

SOVIET SPOKESMEN, FROM Gorbachev on down, have made it clear that altruism is not a motive for their new proposals. Like every other nation state, the USSR is looking after its own interests. It is true that multilateralism through the UN is one way of containing US unilateralism, a motive which Canadian supporters of the UN will understand. It is also evident that the Soviets want to move towards a more open economic system in order to bring some vitality and growth to their declining economy; this will require cooperation with the UN and its members over trading rules and the myriad of commercial relationships which govern international economic life. But the overriding factor is that the Soviets now define their own interests

in terms of the interdependent nature of the planet, and thus wish to use the UN as an instrument of their foreign policy.

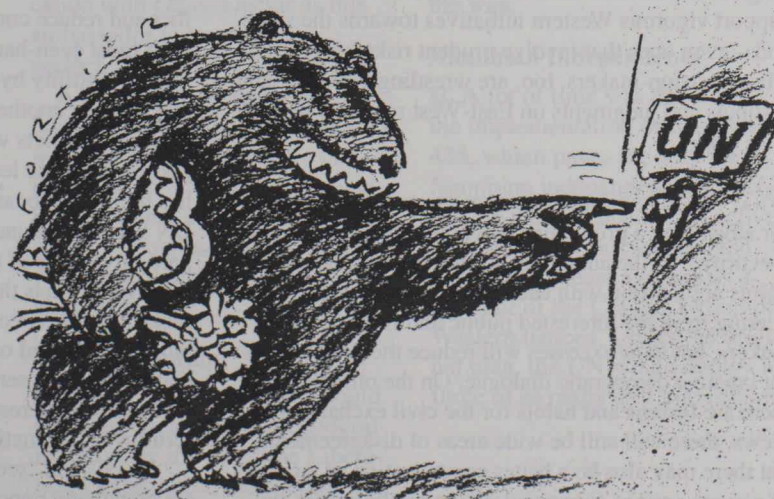
The Soviets are more willing to join in the international give and take, to risk losing face, to propose ideas that other states may not accept, and to go back to the drafting table and try again. Other governments have had some difficulty responding, partly because of suspicion about motives, partly because of the initial vagueness of some of the proposals such as the early versions of the comprehensive security resolution, and partly because they are simply not accustomed to positive and helpful behaviour by the Soviets at the UN.

But respond they should. The UN has not developed in the way its founders hoped for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is the failure of the permanent members of the Security Council to work together. For most of its forty-three year existence, the USSR did not cooperate in a serious way: as Mr. Shevardnadze said in his address to the General Assembly in September, 1988, "Let us say frankly that many of us, including particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, are to blame for the fact that at some point, certain fundamental values of our organization [the UN], embodied in its Charter, were diminished." It is ruefully ironic, that at a time when the Soviets begin to play a constructive role, the Americans are lukewarm, at best. However, mul-

tilateralism in the US reached its nadir earlier in the decade and, particularly with a new administration, opportunities for positive responses exist. President Bush was, after all, the American ambassador to the UN between 1970 and 1973, and is therefore aware of the potential as well as the limitations of the organization. The new US secretary of state, James Baker, was, as secretary of the treasury in the previous administration, involved in the multi-lateral economic system which operates under the aegis of the UN.

CANADA'S MEMBERSHIP ON THE Security Council for the next two years provides this country with a unique opportunity to contribute to the reassertion of the importance of the UN in international life: we have not been on the Council since the two-year term which ended in 1978, and this time around we are the only non-permanent member which is also a member of NATO. Successive Canadian ministers of external affairs have spoken earnestly about Canada's interest in and support of the UN. While we continue to pay our dues promptly and in full, it is necessary also for us to play a constructive part in the debates about strengthening the organization. We fought hard for a seat on the Council: now we should work just as hard at making it an important instrument of our foreign policy. Canadians have a reputation for taking an active role at the UN, and it has always been thought that a strong United Nations was in the Canadian interest. With the Soviets proposing a host of ideas, we should respond in a serious and constructive way to them, and urge our alliance partners to do likewise.

Many of the Soviet proposals have serious flaws and need debate and consideration. But what is interesting about the process is that the Soviets are taking initiatives to make the UN a more effective body. Joining a game whose outcome is in doubt is a departure for the Soviets, it may also be the mark of a country which is beginning to feel secure in its relationships with others. □



Bob Fenner