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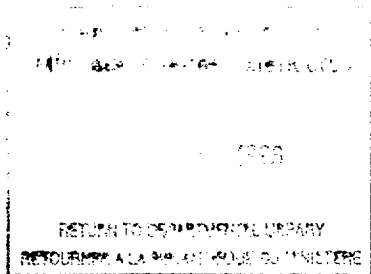
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for the Department of  
External Affairs

# International Perspectives

The Canadian journal on world affairs



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# International Perspectives

*The Canadian journal on world affairs*

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# Ritchie at San Francisco 1945

by Charles Ritchie

*The United Nations was founded at San Francisco in 1945. Canada was represented by a strong delegation, one member of which was Charles Ritchie, who later became Canada's ambassador to the United Nations. He is now retired, lives mostly in Ottawa, and along the way published bits from the diary he kept. What follows are some of his entries made at San Francisco, as found in *The Siren Years*, the winner of the Governor General's Award for 1974. It was published by MacMillan of Canada, whom *International Perspectives* thanks for permission to reprint this excerpt.*

**21 April 1945.**

On the train *en route* to San Francisco. Luncheon with Mackenzie King and was charmed by the fat little conjurer with his flickering, shifty eyes and appliqué smile. He has eyes that can look like grey stones or can shine with amusement or film with sentiment. He chats away incessantly — he seems very pleased with himself, delightfully so, pleased with his own cleverness and with his own survival. He talked of the “fun” of parliamentary tactics which cannot, he added regretfully, be so freely indulged in time of war. He talked of the conscription crisis and said that when it was viewed from the historical point of view its most significant feature would seem to be that the French-Canadian Ministers remained in the Government. That is what saved Canada's unity. I irritated him by remarking that our troops must be thoroughly tired by now. He replied, “They have had two months' rest,” (*when?* I should like to know) and said, “I knew during the recruitment crisis that they were due for that rest but this I could not reveal.”

He described Roosevelt's funeral at Hyde Park naturally and effectively, the silence in the garden and the rightness of the ceremony. He spoke affectionately but not over-sentimentally of Roosevelt himself, adding, “When I last saw him I felt the end might come at any moment. When any subject came up about which he had a complex of worry he collapsed completely. When they called me from the White House to tell me of his death I did not even go to the telephone. I knew what had happened without being told.”

Talking of Mussolini he said, “A remarkably finely-shaped head — the head of a Caesar — deep-set eyes full of intelligence. He did a lot of good —

cleaned up a lot of corruption, but he had too much power for too long. They worship false gods in Europe — that is the trouble — Europe is too full of pictures of Napoleon and statues of the Caesars.”

**26 April 1945. San Francisco.**

The San Francisco Conference. San Francisco is as lively as a circus — the setting and the audience are much more amusing than the Conference performance. No one can resist the attraction of the town and the cheerfulness of the its inhabitants. Nowhere could have been found in the world which is more of a contrast to the battered cities and tired people of Europe. Colours are of circus brightness, the flamboyant advertisements, the flags of all the Conference nations, the brilliant yellow taxis. This seems a technical-or world glossy with cheerful self-assurance. The people are full of curiosity about the Conference delegates. They crowd around them like the friendly, innocent Indians who crowded around the Spanish adventurers when they came to America and gaped at their armour and took their strings of coloured beads for real. The delegates are less picturesque than they should be to justify so much curiosity. There are the inevitable Arabs and some Indians in turbans who are worth the price of admission, and the Saudi Arabian prince who gleams like Valentino, but in general the delegates are just so many men in business suits with circular Conference pins in their buttonholes making them look as if they were here for the Elks' Convention. The exceptions are the Russians — they have stolen the show. People are impressed, excited, mystified and nervous about the Russians. Groups of wooden-looking peasant Soviet officers sit isolated (by their own choice) at restaurant tables and are stared at as if they were wild animals. They are painfully self-conscious, quiet, dignified — determined not to take a step which might make people laugh at the beautiful Soviet Union. The crowds throng outside the hotel to see Molotov, that square-head is much more of a sight than Eden. He is power. When he came into the initial plenary session he was followed by half-a-dozen husky gorillas from N.K.V.D. The town is full of stories about the Russians — that they have a warship laden with caviare in the harbour, etc., etc.

Meanwhile the local Hearst press conducts an unceasing campaign of anti-Russian mischief-making — doing their damndest to start a new world war before this one is finished.

The Conference arrangements have so far been conducted with characteristic American efficiency. The Opera House in the Veterans' Memorial Building where the sessions are to be held is like something out of a Marx Brothers' film. A mob of delegates, advisers and secretaries mill about in the halls asking questions and getting no answers. Where are they to register their credentials? Why have no offices been allotted to them? Where are the typewriters they were promised? To answer them are half-a-dozen State Department officials white with strain and exhaustion who have themselves not yet got office space, typewriters or the remotest idea of how the organisation is to work. Meanwhile, American sailors are shifting office desks through too-narrow doors. The San Francisco Boy Scouts are shoul-

dering and ferreting their way among the crowd (what they are doing no one knows). Junior League young socialite matrons of San Francisco dressed up in various fancy uniforms lean beguilingly from innumerable booths marked "Information," but as they charmingly confess they are just "rehearsing" at present and can no more be expected to answer your questions than figures in a shop-window. All the babble of questions goes on to the accompaniment of hammering conducted in all keys by an army of workmen who are putting up partitions, painting walls, eating out of dinner-pails, whistling, sitting smoking with the legs outstretched in the over-crowded corridors. The only thing that is missing in this scene of pandemonium is Harpo Marx tearing through the mob in pursuit of a pair of disappearing female legs.

**28 April 1945.**

Second meeting of the plenary session again in the Opera House with powerful klieg lights shining down from the balcony into the eyes of the delegates, dazzling and irritating them. The session is declared open by Stettinius, American Secretary of State, who comes on to the dais chewing (whether gum or the remains of his lunch is a subject of speculation). His manner is one of misplaced assurance — unintentionally offensive. (Although the newspapers have described him as handsome, he looks like something out of the bird house at the zoo - I do not know just what — some bird that is trying to look like an eagle.) He makes the worst impression on the delegates. He reads his speech in lay-preacher's voice husky with corny emotion. The Chilean Foreign Minister reads a tribute to Roosevelt which being translated consists of an elaborate metaphor (which gets completely out of control as he goes along) comparing Roosevelt to a tree whose foliage spreads over the world which is struck by what appears to be the lightning of death but is actually the lightning stroke of victory so that its blossoms, while they may seem to wither, are brighter than ever.

Then comes along Wellington Koo of China, a natty, cool, little man in a "faultless" business suit who reads a short speech about China's sufferings, written in careful English. After him Molotov mounts the tribune in an atmosphere of intense curiosity and some nervousness. He looks like an employee in any *hôtel de ville* — one of those individuals who sit behind a wire grille entering figures in a ledger, and when you ask them anything always say "no." You forgive their rudeness because you know they are underpaid and that someone bullies them, and they must, in accordance with Nature's unsavoury laws, "take it out on" someone else. He makes a very long speech in Russian which is translated first into English, then into French, and turns out to be a pretty routine affair. The delegates are by now bored and dispirited. Then Eden gets up and at once the atmosphere changes — you can feel the ripple of life run through the audience as he speaks. It is not that he says anything really very remarkable, but he sounds as if he meant it — as if he believed in the importance of the Conference and the urgency of the work to be done. He is quite beyond his usual form, moved outside himself, perhaps, by exasperation at the flatness and unreality of the proceedings.

22 May 1945.

The back-drop of San Francisco is gloriously irrelevant to the work of the Conference. The people of the town regard the whole proceedings with mixed benevolence and suspicion. Here is an opportunity to make the rest of the world as free, rich and righteous as the United States but it is hindered by the machinations of evil men. Of the uncertainties, worries and fears of the delegates they have no idea.

The day is spent in a series of committee meetings which are teaching me several things — the necessity for patience. It is wonderful to see quick-minded men sitting quite still hour after hour listening to people saying at almost infinite length things which could be said in a sentence or two. One becomes, I suppose, inured to boredom. And in combination with this patience the old hands have great quickness. They have been playing this game so long that they know instinctively by now when and where and how to play the rules of committee procedure or to catch the point of some quite discreet amendment to a motion. They are always on the alert for such things even when they seem to be half-asleep. All this is rather fascinating to a tyro. These are the tricks of the trade. Most men of my age and length of service know them well already.

23 May 1945.

The Conference atmosphere is thick with alarm and despondency about Russia. Wherever two or three are gathered together in the hotel bedrooms and sitting-rooms, where more unbuttoned conversation is permissible there you can bet that the subject is the U.S.S.R. — speculation about their intention, argument as to the best way of dealing with them — whether to be tough and, if so, when — gloomy realisation that by unscrupulous conference tactics they may be courting and perhaps winning the favour of the “working masses.” This fear of Russia casts its long shadow over the Conference. Meanwhile some of the Latin American and Middle Eastern States, by their verbose silliness and irresponsible sniping, almost induce one to believe that there is a good deal to be said for a Great Power dictatorship. But the Great Power representatives have no eloquent, authoritative or persuasive spokesman in the more important committees. They repeat, parrot fashion, “Trust the Security Council. Do nothing to injure unanimity.” There are no outstanding speakers — Evatt of Australia has ability — Berendson of New Zealand has eloquence of a homespun sort — Rollin, the Belgian, has a clever, satirical mind (I take names at random) — but there is no one of whom you say — a great man — and few indeed of whom you say — a fine speaker.

The British Delegation seems pretty thin and undistinguished now that Eden and the other senior Cabinet ministers have gone. Cranborne is skilful and authoritative in committee — Halifax does not attend — Cadogan seems a tired, mediocre *fonctionnaire*. Webster is always at his elbow with an impressive memory (he can quote the documents of the Congress of Vienna, of the Paris Conference, of the Dumbarton Oaks meeting). His heroes are Castlereagh and Wellington. He takes a donnish pleasure in argumentation

and in snubbing people. An excellent adviser — but he should not be allowed his head in policy matters — I do not know if he is — one sometimes sees his hand. The delegation is weak on the economic and social side. There is a grave lack of authority — of men of solid experience, wisdom and moderation, who inform a committee — not so much by what they say as by what they are. Then there is the lack of any representation of the English internationalists or those who have devoted themselves to oppressed peoples and to social causes — that whole humanitarian and social side of English activity goes unrepresented. There were representatives of it, but they have gone home — the brunt of the British representation is borne by a little group thinking in terms of political and military power and with not much feeling for public opinion. As they get more tired they may pull a serious gaffe. They produce no ideas which can attract other nations and are not much fitted to deal with Commonwealth countries.

American policy, or perhaps I should say more narrowly, American tactics in this Conference are similar to British — like the British they hew closely to the party line of support for the Great Power veto while allowing the impression to be disseminated among the smaller countries that they do so reluctantly, that their hearts are in the right place but that they dare not say so for fear of the Russians bolting the organisation. One incidental result of this line which the British and Americans may not contemplate is to increase the prestige of Russia. The United States delegation as a whole is no more impressive than the British. There does not seem to be much attempt to understand the viewpoint of the smaller nations or to produce reasoned arguments to meet their objections. On the other hand, the Americans are extremely susceptible to pressure from the Latin Americans who are not doing at all badly out of this Conference. The only American advisers I know are the State Department Team — shifty-eyed little Alger Hiss who has a professionally informal and friendly manner — which fails to conceal a respectful and suspicious nature said to be very anti-British — Ted Achilles, slow, solid, strong physically as an ox, a careful, good-tempered negotiator and a very good fellow — I should not think much influence on policy.

The U.S.S.R. have achieved a most unfavourable reputation in the Committees. This does not result from dislike for the methods or personalities of individual Russians — so far as the Conference is concerned there are no individual Russians — they all say exactly the same thing (and needless to say this goes for the Ukrainian and Bielo-Russkis). All make the same brief colourless statements — every comma approved by Moscow — from which every trace of the personality of the speaker has been rigorously excluded. Their reputation is one of solid stone-walling and refusal to compromise. On the other hand, they are continually blackmailing other governments by posing as the protectors of the masses against reactionary influence. This they have done so effectively that it is quite possible for them to produce a record at the Conference which would show them battling for the oppressed all over the world. The insincerity of these tactics is patent to those who see



them at close quarters, but will not be so to the public for whom they are designed. They have great political flair — envisage every question not on its merits but entirely from the political point of view. This causes acute distress to (a) the legalistically-minded Latin Americans, (b) all social crusaders and liberal internationalists who see “power politics” invading every aspect of the new organisation, the social, humanitarian and even purely administrative.

The intellectual defence of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals has been left to Wellington Koo, which is rather hard on him, as he had nothing to do with drafting them. (At the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in August 1944, the four Great Powers — Great Britain, China, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. — agreed on a draft text for the creation of the United Nations.) I sat opposite him and he fascinated me — he looks like a little lizard, darting lizard eyes and nose down close to his papers. When he speaks he displays a remarkable collection of *tics nerveux* — he blinks rapidly and convulsively, sniffs spasmodically, clasps and unclasps his immaculately manicured little hands, pulls at the lapels of his coat and continually removes and then readjusts his two pairs of spectacles. This pantomime does not in the least mean that he is nervous of the work in hand — he is a very experienced professional diplomat, quick-minded, ingenious and conciliatory. But, of course, he has not — any more than any of the other Great Powers’ delegates — the moral authority, eloquence and vigour which would be needed to carry the Conference — it would take a Roosevelt or a Churchill to do that — or perhaps Smuts. The Chinese are an endearing delegation, polite and humorous — but then are they really a Great Power?

The French are among the disappointments of this Conference. The Big Power representatives, however undistinguished individually, *do* represent Power and so carry weight. The French are in the position of having to depend on their tradition, their professionalism and that assurance of tough and violent precision in language which have always been at their command in international gatherings. But it is just this assurance that they lack. The French delegation here reinforce the painful impression that I formed in Paris — they seem to be *détraqués*. You do not feel that they have France, *la grande nation*, behind them. They are full of *petits soins* and handshakes to other delegates. They are full of schemes and combinations and suspicions. But there is no steadiness or clarity in their policy. They have no one who is a connecting link with the past and who still retains faith and vitality. The national continuity has been broken. They seem just a collection of clever, amiable, young Frenchmen — and old Paul Boncour is too old and too tired — so is André Siegfried. In fact, you can see the effects of fatigue in the drained faces of almost all the European delegates. Europe (I do not count Russia) is not making much of a showing at this Conference.

In our own delegation Norman Robertson and Hume Wrong are the two most influential senior officials. There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between them. Hume (under whom I worked when he was Counsellor at our Legation in Washington), pale and fine featured, stroking the back of his head with a rapid gesture which suggests mounting impa-

tience. He inspires alarm on first encounter — an alarm which could be justified as he is totally intolerant of muddle, inanity or sheer brute stupidity. He has style in everything from the way he wears his coat to the prose of his memoranda. He is a realist who understands political forces better, unfortunately, than he does politicians themselves.

Norman understands them very well and has influence with the Prime Minister, but what does not Norman understand? His mind is as capacious as his great sloping frame. He has displacement, as they say of ocean liners, displacement physical and intellectual and he is wonderful company with his ironic asides, his shafts of wisdom and his sighs of resignation.

### **5 June 1945.**

We are still tormented by the feeling in our dealings with the Russians there *may* be an element of genuine misunderstanding on their side and that some of their suspicions of some of our motives may not be so very wide of the mark. They on their side seem untroubled by any such scruples. They keep us permanently on the defensive and we wallow about clumsily like some marine monster being plagued by a faster enemy (a whale with several harpoons already in its side). Yet they do not want or mean war.

The struggle for power plays itself out in the Conference committees. Every question before the committees becomes a test of strength between the Russians and their satellites and the rest of the world. The other Great Powers vote glumly with the Russians and send junior members of the delegations to convey to us their discomfiture and apologies. This situation reproduces itself over matters which in themselves do not seem to have much political content. But to the Russians everything is political whether it is something to do with the secretariat of the new organisation or the changing of a comma in the Declaration of the General Principles.

Committee I of the Commission, on which I sit as adviser, deals with the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations (composed of pious aspirations) and the chapters concerned with the Purposes and Principles of the Organisation. It is presided over by a Ukrainian chairman, Manuilsky, said to be the brains of the Communist Party in the Ukraine. My first impression of him was of a humorous and polite old gentleman — an *ancien régime* landowner perhaps. He speaks good French. But I was wrong in everything except the humour — he is quite ruthlessly rude, exceedingly intelligent and moves so fast in committee tactics that he leaves a room full of experienced parliamentarians breathless. It cannot be said that he breaks the rules of procedure — rather he interprets them with great cleverness to suit his ends. And his principal end it to hurry these chapters through the committee without further debate.

### **6 June 1945.**

We had nearly seven hours on end in our Committee on Purposes and Principles. The Chairman, Manuilsky, gave us a touch of the knout when the Latin Americans were just spreading their wings for flights of oratory. He rapped on the table with his chairman's gavel and said, "Gentlemen, we must speed up the work of the Committee. I propose that no one shall leave

this hall until the preamble and the first chapter of the Charter are voted." The delegates gazed ruefully at their blotters — this meant cutting all dinner dates. Yet no one dared to falter in the "sacred task." Paul Gore-Booth, the British delegate, sprang to his feet and said in tones of emotion, "Mr. Chairman I cannot promise that I shall be physically able to remain so long in this hall without leaving it." Manuilsky looked at him sternly. "I say to the British representative that there are in this hall men older than you are, and if they can stay here you must also." So we settled down to hour after hour of debate.

We were after all discussing the principles of the New World Order. The room was full of professional orators who were ravening to speak and speak again. Latin American Foreign Ministers hoped to slide in an oblique reference to some of their local vendettas disguised in terms of the Rights of Nations. The Egyptian representative was hoping to see his way clear to take a crack at the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty under some phrase about the necessity for "flexibility in the interpretation of international obligations." The Syrian delegate saw an opportunity to embarrass the French. The representatives of the Colonial Powers were junior delegates (their chiefs were dining) who were frightened that any reference to "justice" or "human rights" might conceal a veiled attack on the colonial system. All afternoon and all evening until twelve o'clock at night we argued about the principles that must guide the conduct of men and nations. By eleven o'clock there were many haggard faces around the table. The room had got very hot and smelly — dozens of stout politicians sweating profusely in a confined space — outside the street-cars (and San Francisco is a great place for street-cars) rattled noisily and still the speeches went on. The Egyptian delegate was indefatigable in interpolations. He seemed to bounce to his feet on india-rubber buttocks. "A point of order, Mr. Chairman" and he would fix his monocle and survey his helpless victims. The Peruvian was another inexhaustible plague; he was a professional lecturer who kept remarking, "The Peruvian delegation regard this aspect of the question as very grave indeed, in fact fundamental." Then he would remove his reading spectacles, put on his talking spectacles, brush the forelock back from his forehead and get into his stride. But it was the Norwegian who moved me to homicide by making lengthy interventions in an obstinate, bleating voice. However, thanks to the knout, thanks to the ruthless, surgical operations of the Chairman, we finished our task in time. The committee was littered with punctured egos, and snubbed statesmen glowered at each other across the tables. The eminent political figures and distinguished jurists of half the world had been rated by the Chairman like schoolboys; but we had finished on time.

### *18 June 1945.*

The Conference is on its last lap. The delegates — many of them — are quite punch-drunk with fatigue. Meetings start every day at 9 a.m. and go on until midnight. In addition, we are having a heat wave. The committee rooms are uncomfortably hot and the commission meetings in the Opera

House are an inferno. The heat generated by the enormous klieg lights adds to this and the glare drives your eyes back into your head.

We are in a feverish scramble to get through the work — an unhealthy atmosphere in which we are liable to push things through for the sake of getting them finished. The Russians are taking advantage of this state of affairs to reopen all sorts of questions in the hope that out of mere weakness we shall give in to them. Their tone and manner seem daily to become more openly truculent and antagonistic.

Once the labours of the committees are finished, the Articles they have drafted and the reports they have approved are put before the Co-ordinating Committee who plunge into an orgy of revision. There is no pleasanter sport for a group of highly intelligent and critical men than to have delivered into their hands a collection of botched-up, badly-drafted documents and be asked to pull them to pieces and to point out the faults of substance and form. This could go on forever.

However hot, tired and bad-tempered the other delegates may become, Halifax remains cool and Olympian and makes benevolent, cloudy speeches which soothe but do not satisfy. Senator Connally of the U.S. delegation roars at his opponent waving his arms and sweating. It is somehow reassuring to come out from the committee meetings into the streets and see the people in whose name we are arguing so fiercely and who do not give a damn how the Charter reads. Sailors hand in hand with their girls — (this is a great town for walking hand in hand) on their way to a movie or a dance hall.

If the people were let into the committee meetings they would have broken up this Conference long ago.

### ***19 June 1945.***

The Soviet delegates have got very little good-will out of this Conference. They use aggressive tactics about every question large or small. They remind people of Nazi diplomatic methods and create, sometimes needlessly, suspicions and resentment. They enjoy equally making fools of their opponents and their supporters. Slyness, bullying and bad manners are the other features of their Conference behaviour.

Their system has some unfortunate results from their point of view. They have no elbow-room in committee tactics — they cannot vary their method to allow for a change in mood and tempo of the Conference. They are paralysed by the unexpected. They always have to stall and cable home for instructions. It is unfortunate from our point of view as well as theirs that they should have made such a bad showing, for I think they are proposing to make a serious effort to use the organisation and are not out to wreck it.

### ***28 June 1945.***

Back in Ottawa the Conference is over. It is going to be a little disconcerting at first living alone again after our group existence in San Francisco. The hotel sitting-room which Norman Robertson and Hume Wrong shared was a meeting place for members of our delegation and there was a perpetual flow of drinks on tap. There we foregathered to talk Conference gossip. The pace of the Conference got more and more hectic towards the

end. Meetings would end at four or five a.m., when we would fall into bed and drag ourselves up three or four hours later. It also became increasingly difficult to relate the Conference to other events going on in the world and form an estimate of the real importance in the scheme of things of what we were doing in San Francisco. While we were there the war against Germany was won, the occupation of Germany took place, the Russians installed themselves in Prague and Vienna and made their first bid for a port on the Adriatic and bases in the Straits. We were preoccupied with the Battle of the Veto and with the tussles over the powers of the General Assembly and the provisions for amending the Charter. How much were these mere paper battles? How much was the San Francisco Conference a smokescreen behind which the Great Powers took up their positions? These doubts were floating about in the backs of our minds but we had not much time for doubts - the daily time-table was too gruelling.

At any rate, if the Conference was a gigantic bluff, it bluffed the participants — at least some of them.

The final public sessions were decidedly too good to be true. The Opera House was packed with pleased, excited, well-fed people. There was a felling of a gala performance. On the floodlit stage ranged in front of the flags of the United Nations were standing hand-picked specimens of each branch of the United States Armed Forces — very pretty girls from the Women's Forces made up for the floodlighting and wore very becoming uniforms — soldiers and sailors preserving even on this occasion an air of loose-limbed sloppiness.

One after another the speakers mounted the rostrum and addressed us — most of them in their native languages. The text of the speeches in English had been circulated to the audience, but this was hardly necessary as we knew what they would say, and they all said it — in Chinese, Arabic, French and Russian we were told that mankind was embarking on another effort to organise the world so that peace should reign. We were told that the success of the Conference showed that this ideal could be attained if unity was preserved — that we owed it to the living and to the dead to devote all our efforts to this end. Almost all the speeches worked in a reference to the inspiring example of Franklin D. Roosevelt and a flowery tribute to Stettinius (rather wasted as he resigned next day).

It all went off very well — there was really nothing to complain of — no outrageous bit of vulgarity or juke-box sentimentality. Even that great ape, Stettinius, was rather subdued and contented himself with grinning and signalling to his acquaintances in the audience during the playing of the United States National Anthem. The speakers were dignified and sincere — Halifax, Wellington Koo, Smuts, Paul-Boncour — all spoke out of long experience and were impressive. True, they said nothing, but this seemed an occasion when nothing was better than too much. President Truman made a sensible, undistinguished speech — just too long. (He looks like a sparrowy, little, old, small-town, American housewife who could shut the door very firmly in the face of travelling salesmen and tramps.) He got the biggest hand from the audience and after him Halifax. They fell completely for

Halifax's gilt-edged "niceness." What with tributes to the Great Deceased and bouquets to each other and commendatory remarks on the good work accomplished, the whole thing reminded one of speech day at school. In front of me the Argentine Ambassador and his pretty daughter applauded with polite enthusiasm. There were only two cracks in the surface — one was when Masaryk, the Czech Foreign Minister, said at the close of his speech, "Let us for God's sake hear less talk of the next world war." And the other (for me at least) was when Stettinius asked us to stand "in silent memory of the dead in this war whose sacrifice had made this Conference possible." I suppose it had to be said — it sounded as if we were thanking Lady Bountiful for lending her garden "without which this bazaar would not have been possible." As a matter of fact I did think of some of the dead — of Victor Gordon-Ives, who wanted to go on living and to enjoy country-house culture, collect beautiful things and make jokes with his friends — of John Rowley and Gavin Rainnie and the other Canadians whose prompt reaction would have been "Balls to you, brother!" Still, I suppose it had to be said, but not by Stettinius in the San Francisco Opera House on a gala evening to the polite applause of the Argentine Ambassador. □

## The defensible United Nations

by Stephen Lewis

I like the United Nations. I am a shameless apologist for this lovely and byzantine organization. I think it is a first-rate international institution and I do not much care for the gratuitous detractors. There are problems, there are imperfections, there are deficiencies in the United Nations system. But I have often asked myself, as I view it in a novice's way, could it be otherwise after forty years?

We are often worried by the capacity of the superpowers — indeed, all of the Permanent Members of the Security Council — to thumb their noses with impunity at decisions which are taken at the United Nations. That happens from time to time in a way which is disconcerting, unnerving, occasionally frustrating. We know of the proliferation of nation-states, and the way this has engendered within the arena of the General Assembly an excess of rhetorical spleen, some aggressive posturing and occasional

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*Stephen Lewis is Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations. This article is based on an address he gave to the United Nations Association of the United States in New York in 1985.*

extremist attacks. It bothers some more than others. (I quite enjoy it: but then, I have been given to hyperbolic frenzies all my adult life so for me it is merely finding a milieu which is palatable.)

### **Not there yet**

All of us are bothered by the truth that some problems seem endlessly intractable. We have not got peace and disarmament; we have not solved the problems of the Middle East; we cannot seem to handle Namibia and South Africa. That is the crisis of credibility which some so often relate. And on top of all of that, there is the sense of incremental change. The detractors would describe it as a kind of immobility that leads to inertia, compounded by mismanagement.

When you set out that litany it is, I admit, a little unnerving. I am inclined to say "so what?" Sure it is frustrating, sure it is difficult, all of us have to cope with these truths, all of us have to understand their nature. But it does not for a moment — this is what is so important, and it is inconceivable to me that people do not understand it — it does not for a moment invalidate the tremendous contribution which the United Nations makes; it does not for a moment render us impotent; it does not for a moment diminish the value of working to reinforce the strengths of the United Nations.

Now, in a way which bespeaks a certain innocence, I sometimes wonder about the perceptions and motives of various of the detractors.

For some time, it seems to me, the expectations have been extravagant: the achievement of peace and the rule of law is not ushered in over forty years. Forty years is a whisper in the passage of time. We have not had an atomic conflict in forty years and part of that is attributable to the United Nations. Is that not an object worthy of celebration?

For others who are critics of the United Nations, the principle of sovereignty is not understood. Sovereignty is rooted in the Charter of the United Nations. It is not possible for the United Nations to impose its will on sovereign states. You cannot just say to Ethiopia — as much as some would wish it — that the government has to have a ceasefire; has to recognize the rebels; has to open supply lines to Eritrea and Tigre. You cannot just say to Iran and Iraq: "We determine that you end your berserk war; we insist that you bring yourselves to heel before this organization."

### **UN is its members**

It is not the institution of the United Nations, the body corporate, which is the problem. It is the behavior of individual nation-states which is the problem. And it is a profound misunderstanding of the United Nations and the way it operates not to recognize that simple truth. There is no capacity under the Charter to interfere in the internal affairs of member countries. Those are difficult and aggravating complexities. They are also complexities which allow the place to work.

And then there are other critics who are quite simply malevolent and they do great damage. They pretend to be dispassionate, analytic, con-

cerned. In fact they are, by and large, neo-isolationists in their views of the world. They specialize not in insightful analysis, but in inspired sophistry. They are fundamentally anti-internationalist. They do not believe that the national interests of the United States should ever be subsumed in the interests of the greater international community. That makes me impatient. Groups of people who do not understand the moral and human imperatives of the international community in 1985 demonstrate a philistinism for which none of us should have any time.

Yet it does great damage; I have to admit that. And although it saddens me to say so, people of such views engage in easy slanders of the Secretariat to which the Secretary-General is hard-pressed to respond. They put Third World countries on the defensive. They provoke many into needless opposition. So they need to be dealt with, not as an obsession, not as an *idée fixe*, not as a preoccupation, but as a group which wields influence and therefore has to be responded to. Before long, I hope it will be possible thoughtfully to document the flaws, the weakness, the generalizations, the partial truths, the factual errors in what will amount to a dossier of indictment. In other words, in a rational persuasive and thoughtful way, to fight back in the defence of the United Nations. We must say strongly and fervently and unapologetically that this is an institutional forum which deserves the celebration of humankind, not witless and gratuitous criticism.

### **The UN's strengths**

Let us consider the strengths. But in summing the arguments in defence of the United Nations, let us not retreat into the old dialectic. Think of the specialized agencies. UNICEF almost single-handedly legitimizes the nature and character of the United Nations. Four hundred thousand youngsters under the age of five saved from death every year by UNICEF. I stood in a refugee camp earlier this year in The Sudan, right on the border with Ethiopia, to which 80,000 Tigreans had made a migration desperately seeking survival. I stood in that camp and chatted with the doctors from Médecins sans Frontières, and asked them how it was possible to keep children alive in circumstances of such eviscerating desolation, they said to me that "part of the reason is that we have these little packets of oral rehydration therapy to distribute — 15,000 of them a day and in that way, Mr. Lewis, we keep hundreds of children alive." Now it is important for the world to be reminded over and over again, with unselfconscious vigor, that you would never have that outcome without the United Nations. That is the kind of thing which the world body achieves.

More still, you have the United Nations Development Program which spends 675 to 700 million dollars US each year, turning such amounts into further billions of dollars of projects which speak to the economic long-term viability of the countries whose present economies verge on catastrophe because of the African famine. Beyond that, you have the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commission for Refugees), which day in and day out saves tens of thousands of people, and provides shelter and vaguely civilized environments, whether in Pakistan or in the Middle East or in The Sudan.



One could set out specialized agency after specialized agency doing ennobling work. Indeed — dare I say it — including UNESCO. Therefore it is important when summoning the arguments in defence of the United Nations not to forget the specialized agencies.

### The place to do it

Nor — number two — is it possible to forget the kind of very special political environment which is created within the United Nations despite all of its difficulties. In the fall of 1984 the world had not been at the negotiating table in Geneva for more than a year; everybody felt we were perched on the precipice looking into some cataclysm of human destruction; and the superpowers were not talking. Lo and behold Andrei Gromyko comes to the General Assembly and makes a speech within which there is a hint that perhaps the bargaining process can be reinstated, and Ronald Reagan comes to the General Assembly — third year in a row, unprecedented in the history of presidential contributions since 1945 — and makes a speech within which there is a kernel of hope about reinstating the negotiations. A few months later those negotiations are consummated again in Geneva. I think it is palpably true that that could not have happened without the existence of an international agency through which ideological opposites can speak to each other, however obliquely. That is one of the great value of the United Nations.

And so to point number three: the question of some of the intransigent issues which seem to be so frustrating when we deal with them. Let me look at the most difficult of all, arms control and disarmament. Let me remind you of the First Committee in the United Nations. Time and again, year after year, in what some would call a suffocating process — I would call it a liberating intelligence — we deal with resolutions on a comprehensive test ban, on the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, on the non-proliferation treaty, on the nuclear freeze, on nuclear winter, on a ban on fissionable materials, on the reduction of conventional arms; all of these resolutions, one after the other, addressed with vigor and passion and fervor by the countries involved. Yet, say the critics: "You never achieve anything. Resolution after resolution is passed and then not embraced by the superpowers." But the fact of the matter is that such a view of the process is both trivial and distorted, because whether it is in the First Committee in the fall, or whether it is in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, or whether it is in the United Nations Disarmament Commission in May here in New York, *we keep the pressure on the superpowers*. They have to vote, they have to take a stand, they have to meet and speak to every single one of those resolutions. It is absolutely inescapable, and in a very important, if unacknowledged, way helps to maintain a glimmer of sanity in an otherwise lunatic environment. One should therefore applaud and recognize the value of those arms forums even though we recognize as well that the ultimate decision will be made in Geneva.

## **Increasing clout of Secretary-General**

Point number four: the emerging role of the Secretary-General. This is a new kind of Secretary-General, a man who is redefining the office in the contemporary world. We have not seen his like since Dag Hammarskjöld. And that is terribly important to understand.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Pérez de Cuéllar on a three-day state visit to Canada in early March. He is an immensely impressive and formidable advocate one-on-one and in small groups. I observed him talking with my Prime Minister, with my Minister of External Affairs, with a number of senior public servants, and every time he met them in argument he did not retreat. He engages in an advocacy which is quite unrelenting and effective.

What it has done for Pérez de Cuéllar and the United Nations, I think, is to have created a sense of interventionist diplomacy on the one hand, and preventive diplomacy on the other, both of which are giving a new *raison d'être* to the United Nations system. It does not always work, but what in this world does? But when Pérez de Cuéllar wanders off to Southeast Asia to try to deal with Kampuchea; when he deals with the Soviet Union and Pakistan over Afghanistan; when he makes visits to Iran and Iraq; when he deals with the parties in Cyprus; when he moves heaven and earth to sustain the Contadora process in Central America, what Pérez de Cuéllar is doing is bringing the force of his office under Section 99 of the Charter to bear in a way which is ultimately helpful and civilizing. Pérez de Cuéllar's endless wanderings around the planet are of immense value. Occasionally, they result in a cessation of bombing civilian populations in a war such as Iran/Iraq; sometimes even, reconciliation in a place like Cyprus — perhaps in the next year or two. That would be an enormous achievement for the United Nations. Sometimes his efforts bring parties back to a discussion together which they would not otherwise contemplate. Always those efforts prevent, to some extent, a mere fire from becoming a conflagration.

In the context of the United Nations, of the international community, all of that is terribly important: just keeping nations talking. Winning trust, as Pérez de Cuéllar does, is of immense significance. Pérez de Cuéllar is trusted by everyone. US Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick trusted Pérez de Cuéllar; Mr. Troyanovsky, the Soviet Ambassador, trusts Pérez de Cuéllar; Botha of South Africa trusts Pérez de Cuéllar. Pérez de Cuéllar is a man who is giving a new definition to the role of the Secretary-General. That role is not to be lightly impugned or disparaged.

## **Steady achievement**

Finally, point five: the continuing process, year after year in the General Assembly and in the committees associated with it, where we achieve concrete things. That, too, is a matter to be celebrated. At my first session of the United Nations, there was an important resolution on international drug trafficking, which resolution is now on its way to becoming an international Convention. There was, after seven years of painful drafting in Geneva, a

Convention on Torture, a convention which permits us, after twenty countries have signed and ratified it, to identify publicly those who continue to engage in the obscenity of torture. And then there was, of course, the extraordinary response to the African famine.

Historians may look back twenty or thirty years hence and say that the response of the United Nations to the tragedy of Africa was perhaps its finest hour. Not only has the United Nations managed to galvanize tangible international support in a way that has never been experienced before; but in an equally exemplary fashion, it has put in place, on the ground in the twenty countries involved, the kind of coordinating and distributing leadership which is literally saving thousands of lives. I was proud when I was in The Sudan to watch the work of the United Nations' personnel in UNICEF and UNDP and UNHCR. It was something to behold — not only the extent of their commitment, but the way in which the United Nations was delivering food directly into the mouths of those who were starving, and doing it with a level of mastery and resolve which speaks to an extraordinary international body. These matters are matters which should convey pride and consequence by all of us who speak fervently for the international body. The Fortieth Anniversary is a good time to reassert the focus and to deal with the distortions.

The United Nations is simply not as bad as some would have it. Certainly it is polarized in the General Assembly, but not terminally. The General Assembly remains a forum to which the leaders come. Everyone believes now that Gorbachev will come. This is not some kind of incidental inconsequence. It is important that Gorbachev be there, and it is fascinating that he regards the United Nations as an institution sufficiently worthy to address on the Fortieth Anniversary of its life.

Certainly there is extremism. But there is in the United Nations a new spirit of moderation, particularly from some of the developing countries. All you have to do is look at the document "The Declaration on the African Economic Crisis" to see the extent to which the African countries accommodated the interests of the developed world; the extent to which they sought rapprochement.

### **Defence without defensiveness**

I think that the supporters of the United Nations are excessively defensive. It is not necessary to be so defensive. It is not necessary to be dragooned into the arguments of the detractors. The arguments are not terrifically persuasive and they are riddled with self-serving sophistry. It is necessary simply to accumulate the defence and to set it out chapter and verse. Do not be intimidated by those who are critics. Do not succumb to the blandishments of vilifiers. The United Nations is a first rate organization with the simple deficiencies of time and age and circumstance. So what do you do in a situation like that? You analyze it, you speak to its strengths, and then you go out and advocate its work.

Perhaps all of this is, in a sense, self-centeredly Canadian. I hope not. It is a little easier for Canada — a middle power, quite unthreatening, utterly

non-nuclear, and with a particular advantage in being bilingual so that we have special access to the francophone world. We have, above all, a lasting and visceral commitment to multilateralism which is ingrained, and endemic to the Canadian character. We share this continent with the United States; we are good friends, and we hope that we can in the future share as well Canada's more positive view of the United Nations. I have learned as I travelled over the last number of months that it is not hard to convey a more positive view of the United Nations. There is a yearning everywhere amongst people to affirm the validity of the international community and of an international organization.

The Charter may, here and there, be under siege; but it is still an incomparable blueprint for a more just, civilized, humane and tolerant international community. One day we shall achieve it — infidels of all varieties notwithstanding. And so to the dreamers, the idealists, the pragmatists, the artisans in the vineyards of human betterment, the indefatigable apostles in the cause of peace, to all who are tenacious, and unrelenting, I wish you well and ask you never to be cowed. □

## Canada at the United Nations

by Peyton V. Lyon

How 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

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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.

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.

### **Superpower ratings**

Criticizing the United States was a principal pastime of most of our respondents. The criticism had less to do with the substance of US policies, provocative as these often were, than with the arrogance, abrasiveness, absenteeism and incompetence of the US mission. The senior US Ambassador at the time, Mrs. Jeane Kirkpatrick, herself criticized the "amateurishness" of the US performance, especially compared to the British. One of her American associates agreed, and added that the US could be "four times" as effective in the UN if it took the organization seriously. Indeed, if one measures the US performance against the ranking of twelve factors of UN influence, one would conclude that the US must be ranked as close to the bottom of the influence heap; it was strong by the *lowest* five criteria, but weak by five on the first seven.

The Soviet Union, by contrast, was represented by a thoroughly experienced mission, headed by a long time ambassador of notable talent and affability. A senior American working for the Secretariat commented that the Soviet mission contained the best expert on almost every item on the UN agenda. The Soviet diplomats were not only active and knowledgeable but tactful enough to limit the length of their speeches. Measured against our respondents' ranking of factors of influence, the Soviet Union would be expected to come out number one. In fact the USSR was far more likely than the US to be on the winning side of contested votes. The United States was increasingly in a minority of one, or isolated with Israel in a lonely twosome.

Nevertheless, when we asked our respondents directly to name the most influential members, the response favored the United States by a wide margin. Of the large majority that named the two superpowers, three-quarters estimated that the United States was out in front. Frequently, it was noted, the Americans seemed indifferent to the outcome of votes, or even to the way their allies were leaning. A number observed that the US seemed to enjoy its "Lone Ranger" role.

On issues the US judged to be of paramount importance, however, such as Arab moves to expel Israel, or Cuba's attempt to inscribe Puerto Rico on the UN agenda, the United States exerted its full influence, and the result could not be in doubt. The Soviet Union followed the Third World majority, it was contended, rather than giving it leadership. Its invasion of Afghanistan had probably cost it more respect than the US had lost through its bully tactics in Central America and elsewhere.

More certain is the influence gained by the United States as the principal source of the UN's financial support. Although decidedly less generous in per capita terms than the Scandinavians or Canada, US contributions, assessed and voluntary, remain by far the most substantial. An American threat to cutback, or withdraw, is difficult to ignore, and US wishes are quietly taken into account in the drafting of most resolutions. Soviet contributions are much smaller, and yet almost as grudging; indeed the two superpowers now collaborate in efforts to hold down the UN's relatively modest budget. It is hardly surprising that Soviet influence is notably weaker than that of the US in dealing with issues, such as international development, that are costly.

### **Third World leaders**

When we asked our interviewees to name the most influential member of the Third World majority, India emerged far in front, with almost twice the mentions given the second place runner, Yugoslavia. India was also rated as second only to the two superpowers in overall UN influence. Comments suggested that this was a tribute as much to the quality of India's officials as it was to its size and relative maturity.

Ranked fourth and fifth in overall UN influence were France and Britain. Notably *not* mentioned were two weightier members of the western community, Japan and West Germany. This suggests that influence is perceived to accompany permanent membership on the Security Council. France and Britain enjoy the further advantage of having former colonies in the organization. Britain is generally considered to have fielded better representatives at the UN. France's slightly higher rating in perceived influence may therefore be related to its reputation for independence. When we asked "which members of the UN are most closely associated with the United States?" three-fourths of the respondents said "Britain"; well down the list came West Germany and Israel, with several mentions of Canada. No one suggested France! Under Mitterrand, moreover, France has appeared more sympathetic to the United Nations and the Third World.

In the ranking of perceived influence, the first five were followed by Yugoslavia, Algeria, Cuba, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Brazil and Pakistan. Algerian diplomats, tough in championing Third World interests, were widely respected. Cuba had gained influence through its presidency of the nonaligned movement. China? The world's most populous nation is difficult to ignore, especially when it has inherited an ancient civilization. Nevertheless, most of the comment about China's UN performance was patronizing. After a decade, it was suggested, China was beginning to learn the rules of the UN game.

Some respondents mentioned more countries than did others. If *all* mentions are counted, Sweden and Canada tied for fourteenth place. (If one combines the influence ranking for the different issue areas, Canada emerged in seventh place, behind only the superpowers, India, Yugoslavia, Algeria, Nigeria and Brazil. As our selection of issues was necessarily limited, however, little weight can be attached to this ranking.)

### **Are issues interconnected?**

We asked whether the stand taken by a country in one issue area, such as the Middle East, was likely to affect its influence in another, say arms control. Most of the respondents, even including half the Arabs, indicated that it would not. We also asked about the issue areas in which Canada was seen to be particularly strong. A substantial majority indicated that our greatest influence lay in economic development, itself the most substantial of current UN activities. Several mentioned Trudeau's role in the North-South dialogue, notably at the Cancun conference. Only a fifth as many respondents cited Canada's role in arms control, an issue taken very seriously by the Canadian mission. Its influence in the human rights field was cited by about the same modest portion. However, the few respondents familiar with this field tended to be high in praise; Canada, Yugoslavia and the Netherlands were considered to be the strongest contributors. A similar minority cited the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea as the setting of Canada's greatest input. An even smaller number, about 10 percent, cited Canada's influence in UN peacekeeping, and about 5 percent international law. Issue areas given single mentions included Namibia, refugees, chemical weapons, food, environment, outer space and the budget.

### **Is there a "Canadian role?"**

A related question asked for Canada's "role" in the UN. A disappointing third declined to give any answer. A tenth of those answering said "peacekeeper." Another tenth suggested "consensus-builder," "conciliator," "honest-broker" or "conduit." Almost as many said "UN supporter." Another significant minority saw Canada principally in its relations with the United States, and suggested as its role "US moderator," "Western moderate" or "enlightened independent." Others cited its leadership in the economic field and the North-South dialogue. Scattered references were made to Canada as a promoter of arms control, women's rights, all human rights, UNICEF, science and technology, and sovereignty over natural

resources. One East European called Canada "the UN's lawyer." Canada's role was given as "supporter of the West," but also "to be seen as non-American." Other single descriptions were "promoter of realism," and "like any other, to push national aims." The last word: "Canada has a role but doesn't play it."

Invited to name the UN member that behaves most like Canada, by far the largest number, over a third, suggested Australia. It seemed quite possible that the respondents had area, history and culture in mind rather than UN behavior. However, some did stress similarity in voting and in attitudes towards the Third World and the Middle East. Both countries were described as "rational" and as "enlightened allies of the United States with some autonomy." One interviewee praised their commitment to the UN, but added that they were "equally insignificant in the real struggle." A further tenth likened Canada's behavior to that of other members of the old Commonwealth — to New Zealand because both were "trustworthy," "realist," and "independent of the US"; or to the United Kingdom, another "moderator."

A fifth of the responses compared Canada in the UN to Sweden, the "Nordics" or the Netherlands, all among the most admired members of the club. Not surprisingly, the explanations for these choices were flattering — "idealism," "internationally-minded," "consensus builders," "pro-United Nations," "independent judgment," "peacekeepers" and "similar support for rights and development." About half as many suggested the West Europeans as the most similar to Canada in UN behavior. The comparable number that cited the United States as Canada's UN analogue stressed the similarity in the stands and votes of the two.

France was mentioned five times. Like Canada, it is "friendly to everyone," "concerned about consensus," and "supportive of self-determination." The minority that cited Ireland or Austria said it was because their ideas were similar to Canada's: devotion to the UN; and "relative independence within the West." Poland received a single mention ("It too has a sovereignty problem"), as did West Germany, Japan, Italy, Norway and Mexico.

### **Who supports the UN?**

We asked which country had been from the outset the most consistent supporter of the United Nations. A quarter answered the "Nordics," and Sweden received several additional mentions. The country mentioned most often was Canada — by one sixth of the respondents. Well behind were the United States, India, the USSR, the Netherlands, Britain, Austria, Yugoslavia, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Saudi Arabia. Japan did well to receive four mentions; it had not become a member until the UN had celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Diplomats from no fewer than nine different countries, including members of NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the nonaligned movement, all identified their own countries as the ones behaving in the UN most like Canada. What does that say about Canadian diplomacy?



We requested the respondents to score, on a scale of one to seven, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden in terms of their commitment to the UN, independence in the UN, leadership in the UN, role as consensus builder, and support for self-determination, peacekeeping and international development. Sweden emerged as the front runner by all criteria. Averaging the seven ratings, Canada (5.2), came out decidedly below Sweden (5.9), but slightly ahead of Norway (5.2) and substantially ahead of the Netherlands (5.0) and Australia (4.6). It led the Netherlands and Australia on each of the seven items. Canada was considered much stronger than Norway in "leadership," but trailed in "support of self-determination"; it was slightly ahead of Norway in support of international development, even though Norway's contribution, in terms of per capita GNP, was considerably greater. Canada's score was highest for "peacekeeping" (6.0), "commitment to the UN" (5.8), and "support for development" (5.7); it was lowest on "leadership" (4.5), "independence" (4.8), "consensus promotion" (4.8) and "support for self-determination" (5.0).

Had this been an *all-inclusive* popularity contest, Sweden might still have emerged at or near the top. Considerably smaller than Canada, it is also more single minded in soliciting Third World support. One Swede told us, with at least a trace of embarrassment, that his government decided that, since the UN was the Third World's club, Sweden would play by the Third World's rules. Its nonaligned foreign policy obviously made this easier. Several Third World countries, such as India and Yugoslavia, would almost certainly out-rank Canada and Norway in popularity. Canada's ranking in the "good company" of the Scandinavians, the Netherlands and Australia was nevertheless impressive.

### Canada's best and worst features

We proceeded to ask the respondents to specify the *best* and the *weakest* characteristics of Canada's UN diplomacy. For the "best," a quarter cited our familiar roles as mediator, moderator or consensus-builder. Almost as many relied on flattering adjectives such as straightforward, consistent, fair, reliable, honest, frank, principled, sensible, pragmatic, pacific, friendly, likeable and able. Our diplomats were always well briefed, it was stressed, and up on the fine print. A smaller portion cited Canada's function as "friendly critic" of the United States, and praised its willingness to take "tough," "independent" stands. One respondent noted that Canada's main strength was that it was seldom a "demandeur." It was refreshing, after all this, to be asked by one interviewee: "But *does* Canada have a UN diplomacy?"

Far less consensus emerged when we turned to the perceived weaknesses. With a membership approaching 160, it should hardly be surprising that many of our respondents had had little opportunity to focus on Canada. Some of our respondents could think of *no* defects in Canada's UN performance. Some suggested the same characteristic, such as "honesty" or "modesty," that they had cited as its strength — and could usually explain why. Almost a third raised Canada's close association with the United States: a

smaller group claimed that our greatest weakness was our effort to appear different from our major ally — “a bad case of Scandinavianitis,” one complained.

### **Canada's Ambassadors**

The second largest group was critical of Canada's “low profile.” It was too quiet, they frequently said, too withdrawn, too unassertive, too inactive or too indefinite. (These responses, it should be noted, were given before Stephen Lewis became Canada's UN Ambassador.) One interviewee said Canada suffered in the UN by not being one of the LDCs (Less Developed Countries); a couple of other complained that our weakness lay in being intimidated by the LDCs. Several said our greatest weakness was strong partiality for Israel. Others said we were excessively anti-Soviet. Several held that we were too spread out over a large number of issues. One said the greatest weakness was “proximity” to Ottawa, and the consequent necessity to deal with a flood of visitors expecting attention. (As the recipient of many mission favours, this author understood, and blushed.)

We asked respondents to distinguish, if they could, Canadian and US diplomacy in the UN. Only a handful said they could see no difference, but a sixth considered it to be trivial. The largest portion, a third, noted Canada's greater understanding of the LDCs and generosity towards them. A half that portion had observed Canada's greater support of arms control. Other small minorities noted Canada's more positive stand on the Law of the Sea, greater “balance” in dealing with the Middle East, and stronger support for human rights and other humanitarian measures. A dozen respondents stressed that Canada's UN diplomacy was less rigid or ideological; it was also seen as friendlier and more concerned to build bridges. Unlike the United States, we were told, “Canada really believes in the UN, supports it, and uses it.”

One diplomat could detect *no* similarity between the Canadians and Americans except that “they speak the same language.” A considerable majority clearly could distinguish between the two diplomacies, in both style and content. Almost all of the stated differences were in Canada's favor, and many went out of their way to stress that they saw Canada as independent. Difficult to ignore, however, was the observation of a much respected Western ambassador that “Canada, like fifty-six others, hides behind the US veto.” It is easier to be a nice guy if you are confident that someone else will block unpleasant measures.

### **Is the US a stigma?**

“Influence in a group or groups,” it will be recalled, was ranked second among the factors of overall influence in the UN, and Canada's primary association is almost inescapably with the US and NATO. When we asked: “Would Canada's diplomacy in the UN be more effective, or less effective, if it ceased to be an ally of the United States?” several nonaligned representatives could not conceive of Canada's doing anything so rash. Almost half thought that Canada would gain in influence, at least within the UN. The

majority was evenly split between those who speculated that ceasing to be a US ally would cost Canada in influence, and those who considered that it would make no difference.

A majority recommended, in effect, that Canada adopt their countries' posture, but there were interesting exceptions. A nonaligned African ambassador, for example, said: "To be selfish, I hope Canada stays close to the US. It can do more to help us there." Several Soviet bloc respondents were also convinced that Canada served the common cause, as well as its own, by staying in NATO.

Except for membership in NATO, Swedish and Norwegian policies are very close, and both countries are often considered similar to Canada. Resentment of military blocs would seem to be the principal reason why Sweden was regarded more warmly than Canada and Norway by the non-aligned majority in the UN. Other responses, however, demonstrated that popularity and influence were not the same thing, and Canada was judged to be at least as influential as Sweden. Many would applaud if Canada severed its alliance ties, but it might well become less effective, even in the strictly UN context.

### **Is influence changing?**

What in fact is happening to Canada's UN influence? Almost four-fifths responded that it was remaining "about the same"; one sixth indicated an increase, half as many a decline.

Comments from long-time members of the Secretariat and other UN observers were often more critical. Almost all concurred that Canada was less influential now than in the early years. Considering the dramatic change in UN membership, a drop in Canadian influence was cause for neither surprise nor dismay. More serious was the complaint from about half this group, that Canada had become less committed, and was trying less. Others contested the point vigorously. Canada's support does appear to have declined in some issue areas, such as peacekeeping. It has increased in others, however, most notably in international development and human rights. And support remains very serious in disarmament.

Canada continues to field a strong and active mission to the UN, led as a rule by an outstanding Ambassador. We heard almost as many tributes to William Barton, Canada's representative in the mid-seventies, as to Lester Pearson. Many in the UN thought that quietness was carried to an extreme by Gerard Pelletier, Canada's Ambassador at the time of our interviews; we also heard praise of his commitment and skill, however, and it should be recalled that our respondents attached little value to speechmaking as a factor of influence in the UN.

The speeches of Pelletier's successor, Stephen Lewis, may prove to be the exception. His extraordinary eloquence, and his willingness to defend the UN, will certainly win admiration, and may compensate for the time spent away from the UN corridors where Pearson and Barton made their great impact.

Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark has warmly reaffirmed

Canada's traditional support for the UN. Prime Minister Mulroney, however, has emphasized that the first plank in Canada's foreign policy is now friendship with the United States, and this at a time when Washington has never been more hostile to the UN. The two objectives are not totally irreconcilable, but Canada's UN diplomacy appears to be in for a testing period. □

## The UN at forty

by Nancy Gordon

The forthright nature of Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar's first report to the United Nations in September 1982, surprised many observers of the world organization. His candor was refreshing. Instead of surveying the broad range of the work of the UN, Perez de Cuellar focussed on the central problem of the organization's capacity to keep the peace and to serve as a forum for negotiation. "We are perilously near to a new international anarchy," he said. "I believe that we are at present embarked on an exceedingly dangerous course . . . . Above all, this trend has adversely affected the United Nations."

These words were written in the aftermath of the June 1982, Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the establishment in Beirut of a multinational force outside the auspices of the UN, which was to try to keep the peace in that troubled city. In April 1982, Britain and Argentina had been at war over the Falklands/Malvinas, and the bloodshed in the Iran/Iraq war continued unabated.

The 1983 report of the Secretary-General was equally frank. Issued shortly after the downing of the Korean airliner in September 1983, and against the backdrop of the threatened curtailment of the arms control talks in Geneva between the US and the USSR, his report deplored the "partial paralysis of the United Nations as the guardian of international peace and security." He went on to ask, "Who can possibly believe that a world dominated by the nuclear balance, where \$800 billion a year is spent on armaments and where a large proportion of the population lives in destitution and with little real hope, is on the right track? And yet, paradoxically, for the time being at any rate, the United Nations, which was set up to deal

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with such problems, is too often on the sidelines as far as many major issues are concerned."

In this third report (September 1984) the Secretary-General was more positive about the UN and its accomplishments. But he was far from sanguine, and he asked, "Why has there been a retreat from multilateralism at a time when actual developments both in relation to world peace and to the world economy would seem to demand their strengthening."

### **Some real failures**

The litany of problems and complaints about the UN is long and familiar. Collective security, as envisaged at San Francisco, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" has not worked out as the founders had hoped. The Security Council, the main organ for conflict resolution and enforcement of the peace, has often been hamstrung by the veto power of the permanent members. The General Assembly, whose members now number 159, is too often the scene of polemic debate instead of reasoned discussion and the search for compromise. Resolutions passed by the Assembly are often ignored by member governments, becoming almost meaningless.

In terms of substance there are a number of perennial items on the agenda of the UN on which there seems to be little progress. The major ones are: the Middle East, including the relationship between Israel and its neighbors, and the question of Palestine; and the policy of apartheid of the government of South Africa, and the related question of the independence of Namibia. These problems are unsolved; the war between Iran and Iraq continues; countries have resorted to force in the Falklands/Malvinas, Central America, Grenada, Africa, Afghanistan, Kampuchea; economic disparities between North and South are increasing; the arms race continues unabated; human rights violations remain. All this is often laid at the door of the UN. It is assumed that all these troubles are somehow the fault of the UN, that if only the UN were a more effective organization, nirvana would be with us. Perez de Cuellar, in his three reports, has come to grips with the fact that these situations are still with us, and are, in their cumulative effect, more life-threatening than ever. But, he has said, instead of making the UN the scapegoat for the sorry state of our world, let us try together to *use* the institution as a means of solving these problems. As a start, let us take a few small steps to make the organization more effective.

### **Some big changes**

Difficulties with the UN system have been appearing for some time, a natural development for an institution which was conceived during World War II and born at its conclusion. One need only think of the fantastic rate of change since 1945 in all areas of human activity to realize what a different world it is now. Scientific and technological developments provide the most obvious examples. In 1945, for instance, it was a major undertaking for delegates from some fifty countries to get to San Francisco. Today, that would be quite simple. The change which has most affected the UN has been

the increase in the number of states, and their impact upon international politics. The magnificent UN success in promoting decolonization and self-determination has led to the strengthening of the concept of national sovereignty. That concept is the antithesis of multilateralism — the core of a functioning UN. We are now embarking on the difficult process of adjusting to this paradox. The UN's membership has expanded more than three-fold since its establishment, and there has been a marked change in the political focus at the UN as well as in how it operates. There is little general agreement on the direction of international relations between developed (who have both the power and resources to implement UN decisions) and developing states (who now form the overwhelming majority) to take or force decisions in the UN.

Readjustment of the international power balance has been exacerbated by three factors in the 1980s:

- 1) a severe economic recession has restricted the amount of funding available;
- 2) a deepening hostility in East-West political relations, particularly between the USSR and the US has had a political spillover into various UN bodies; and
- 3) the administration in the USA in the aftermath of the Vietnam war and the Iranian hostage incident has sought to reassert American global influence by emphasizing its power in bilateral, as opposed to multilateral, relationships.

Whether the attitudes of the US or the emphasis on sovereignty by Third World states is cause or effect, interdependence is more than ever a fact of international life. The world needs the UN to provide a means for working out the balances, compromises and adjustments among conflicting interests. And the UN needs the active cooperation of all members, particularly the five permanent members of the Security Council, and especially the two superpowers.

### **US attitudes**

It is taken for granted that the USSR has always had an ambivalent attitude towards the UN. It is a matter of concern however when some of that ambivalence is displayed by the USA. The UN would be very much less effective without the full and active participation of the USA. It is sometimes forgotten that in the immediate post-1945 period, there were fears that the Americans would avoid responsibility, not that they would seek to monopolize it. The Reagan administration has, up to now, displayed a thinly-veiled contempt for the UN, in the tradition of the isolationists of the 1920s who rejected the League of Nations. That attitude was apparent in September 1983, when, as a direct fallout of the Korean airline incident, a Soviet Aeroflot plane which would have carried Foreign Minister Gromyko to the opening of the General Assembly was denied permission to land at civilian airports in New York and New Jersey. The US State Department offered a military airfield as an alternative, but this offer was refused by the

USSR. Gromyko did not attend the Assembly, and during this period there was a great deal of discussion as to whether the USA had violated the Headquarters Agreement with the UN. A senior member of the US delegation suggested that perhaps the UN should leave the United States, a remark which received wide public attention.

Examples of the Americans' unhappiness with the UN system are many: their withdrawal from UNESCO; their failure to ratify the Law of the Sea treaty; their withholding of assessed funds for UN programs of which they disapprove. American opposition to UN actions is symbolized by the tough position taken by Jeane Kirkpatrick on these and other issues. These actions have led some to ask whether the Reagan approach is the natural path of US foreign policy in the tradition set by George Washington's valedictory address to Congress and the Monroe Doctrine, and not the more altruistic philosophy of the postwar period as symbolized by the Marshall Plan.

### **Two divisive issues**

The two political issues which are excessively divisive at the UN are the situation in the Middle East and the continuing policy of apartheid by the government of South Africa. The latter has been excluded from the UN General Assembly since 1974 when its credentials were refused; and, in recent years, there have been periodic attempts made to exclude Israel from meetings in UN bodies. These issues have now reached the entire UN system, often paralyzing action in unrelated fields. In the autumn 1984 issue of *Foreign Affairs* former Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim says that "the effect of this activity is to cheapen the currency of UN resolutions and thus to reduce the effectiveness of the United Nations in the peaceful resolution of disputes. I do not question the good faith of those who sponsor such resolutions. I do question their judgment."

The UN system is based on a functional, rational and efficient distribution of responsibilities and activities. Each UN body in that system should adhere to its mandate and respect the division of labor on which the system is predicated. To act otherwise results in growing dissatisfaction, chaos in programs, and absorbs limited resources at the expense of the purposes of the organization. As an example, the World Health Organization as the name implies, deals primarily with health, not, as has occurred, with the Arab-Israeli dispute or disarmament issues for which it is neither equipped nor mandated. This kind of situation is occurring more frequently and, if not managed and controlled, can in the long run only destroy the organization concerned.

### **Secretary-General's proposals**

Beginning with his 1982 report and following the same pattern in 1983 and 1984, Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar has made specific suggestions for changes both in attitude and performance. He has appealed for a "conscious recommitment by governments to the Charter," and the use of

UN mechanisms to settle disputes and differences through peaceful means so that governments can have real confidence in the UN:

Without such a system governments will feel it necessary to arm themselves beyond their means for their own security, thereby increasing the general insecurity . . . . Without such a system there will be no reliable defence or shelter for the small and the weak. And without such a system all our efforts on the economic and social side, which also need . . . collective impetus, may well falter.

The Secretary-General suggested more systematic, less last-minute use of the Security Council, along with adequate working relations among the permanent members of the Council: "Whatever their relations may be outside the United Nations, within the Council the permanent members, which have special rights and responsibilities under the Charter, share a sacred trust that should not go by default owing to their bilateral difficulties." He urged more realism in resolutions, along with more governmental attention to them. He advised members that he intended to play a more forthright role in bringing potentially dangerous situations to the attention of the Council under Article 99 of the Charter, and that he intended to do so in a more systematic way. He suggested an increasing fact-finding capability for his office, along with swift procedures for the Council to send good offices missions, military or civilian observers to areas of potential conflict. He recommended an urgent review of peace-keeping operations, reminding members that the main strength of such operations "is the will of the international community which they symbolize. Their weakness comes to light when the political assumptions on which they are based are ignored or overridden."

On the subject of economic development Perez de Cuellar, in his 1983 report, discussed the considerable accomplishments of the UN system in assisting developing countries. He pointed out however that much more needs to be done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that system, and to avoid duplication of effort by the specialized agencies and bodies within the system.

### **Canadian attitude**

The reaction of the Canadian government to the Secretary-General's analysis and recommendations has been positive. In his speech to the Assembly in 1983 the then-Minister of External Affairs, Allan MacEachen, lauded Perez de Cuellar's attempts to make the UN a more effective organization. Such support is consistent with the functional approach taken by Canada at the UN. Canada announced its willingness to help strengthen the fact-finding capability of the Secretary-General by offering to share, on a regular and systematic basis, information with his office. Canada supported his idea of making greater use of his authority to bring current or potential crisis situations to the attention of the Council, and suggested regular informal meetings of the Council to avert potential crises by examining incipient disputes during *in camera* sessions with the Secretary-General.



This pragmatic approach was reaffirmed by the current Minister of External Affairs, Joe Clark, in his address to the 39th UN General Assembly on September 25, 1984. He stressed the fact that as a middle power Canada depended on multilateral as well as bilateral mechanisms to promote its foreign policy.

Perez de Cuellar has been an active Secretary-General. He came close, behind the scenes, to resolving the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. He is constantly trying to increase his involvement to bring about an end to the Iran/Iraq war. Although he has obtained the agreement of the belligerents to cease attacks on civilian population centres, he continues to be frustrated by the diametrically opposite positions of Iran and Iraq, with neither willing to respond to international pressures. He has been using his good offices in many intractable situations such as Cyprus, Afghanistan and Kampuchea. He took a considerable risk in the autumn of 1983 by making a trip to South Africa to discuss Namibia, and he skillfully managed to retain his credibility with both sides.

### Using the UN

The necessity for multilateralism in our interdependent world is obvious. The UN is the one universal institution we have; it is absolutely essential that it work. In this period of adjustment what is needed is a new consensus or understanding of the *de facto* power relationships in the world. Power blocs must realize that their interests are best served when the system works. Otherwise, chaos and disaster are the likely consequences. □

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