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CANADA AT THE UNITED NATIONS

An Address by W.H. Barton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to the United Nations Association in Canada, Winnipeg, May 13, 1977

In our program, my subject, "The Canadian Perspective – Canada at the United Nations", is presented in the context of the more general heading "the management of change", and I shall try today to shape my presentation within that general framework.

At the outset, I feel I must pose the question: Do we manage change or does change manage us? Perhaps the most we do is manage our adaptation to changes that come upon us willy-nilly. For example, the men and women who drafted the UN Charter and represented their governments at the time of its adoption no doubt would have agreed to the proposition that we live in the age of the nation state. And, indeed, the Charter itself states that the organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members. But I strongly doubt that they could have conceived of the lengths to which this concept would be stretched. Paul Martin may have had some idea of the consequences of the initiative he took in 1955 to work out a package deal on membership, but I suspect that even he did not foresee the day when we should have nearly 150 nations, most of them desperately poor and some with populations of only a few thousand.

The example I have cited is, of course, the first and perhaps the most fundamental change – one to which Canada, like all other member states, is still in the process of adapting. Let me mention some other fundamental changes in the UN. First, in 1945 the primary responsibility of the organization was seen to be the maintenance of peace and security. Today, let us be frank, the UN has adjusted its sights to a somewhat more modest role.

The UN has been able to fulfil an important – indeed vital – support function through the establishment and operation of peacekeeping forces, observer missions and investigative bodies. Canada has always been an active supporter of the UN in this respect, and this sense of involvement led us to play a leading role in the establishment of all the different UN peacekeeping activities over the years. Our appreciation of the importance of this function has also meant that, notwithstanding the circumstances of the termination of UNEF and the withdrawal of our troops in 1967, we were prepared to participate in the new UNEF and in UNDOF in 1973.

Security Council resolutions also have had value in providing a negotiating structure – for example, Resolution 242 on the Middle East. It can even be argued that General Assembly resolutions on peace and security matters, anodyne or prejudicial though they may usually be, do serve a useful purpose. But, except in one case, the permanent members of the Security Council have been unable to agree on the application of

the powers vested in it under Chapter VII of the Charter, and the number of major disputes in which the UN has been powerless to intervene in any way and the secondary character of its role in most of those where it has had a part to play are sufficient proof that the expectations of 1945 in this vital area have had to be significantly modified.

It is a sad fact that the value of the contribution by the UN to peace and to the prospects for settlement of disputes has been considerably diminished in the eyes of many Western nations, and particularly the United States and Canada, by the war of words that has gone on in the General Assembly and in most of the other forums available in the UN family of organizations – particularly, but not exclusively, over the Middle East situation. But I venture to suggest that there are some offsetting factors that should not be lost sight of. It has contributed to the air of crisis that has made the major powers face up to the fact that they must make vigorous renewed efforts to help the “protagonists” find a solution. It has brought home to the Western world the primordial importance attached by most members of the UN to the notion that the occupation of the territory of one power by another is intolerable. And it has made it crystal clear that, in the case of the Middle East, peace will be unattainable unless the legitimate interests of the Palestinians are met.

Irrespective of what we think of this aspect of UN concern with issues of peace and security, continued UN involvement is indispensable. We, for our part, shall continue to accept the necessity to support those actions that we think are right and to oppose those that are bad – not only in the UN itself but in our relations with other governments.

As a further example of fundamental change, let me cite the elimination of colonialism, which, in 1945, was a largely-unrealized dream. Today, although the old colonial empires are gone, we are confronted with a new awareness of the terrible problems of southern Africa. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that, in many lands where colonialism has ended, viable alternatives to the old colonial economic system have not been found. Political institutions have proved to be fragile, and new abuses of human rights have taken the place of old.

So far as southern Africa is concerned, we must expect that it will continue to be a major preoccupation at the United Nations so long as the independence of Rhodesia and Namibia under governments based on the principle of minority rule is denied, and so long as *apartheid* persists in South Africa. The African nations, having obtained their own freedom and a voice in the organization, have pressed the issue during the past ten years with increasing effect, until every member state has joined in invoking sanctions against Rhodesia and denouncing South Africa for its policy of *apartheid* and for its illegal occupation of South West Africa (Namibia). Now the Africans are demanding that the Security Council should invoke Chapter VII of the Charter to impose an arms embargo and sanctions against South Africa. Thus far, Canada and most Western nations have not been prepared to contemplate such action.

For Canada, the problem of southern Africa involves a number of factors in addition to the question of sanctions, all of which have to be taken into account as matters

develop. Trade with South Africa is significant but, whereas it was once the main component in our trade with the whole of Africa, this is no longer so. The total volume of our trade with the rest of the continent is now four times as large. The question of the human rights of the black majority has been a prominent element in our policy consideration, but it is evident from letters we receive from concerned Canadians that some at least feel that we should have our own house in better order before we denounce others. They are apprehensive also that majority rule will also mean the loss of human rights by the white minority.

It will be evident from all of this that the resolution of this last phase of colonialism will be a priority concern of Canada, along with the rest of the membership of the UN, for some time to come.

Let me cite as my final example of fundamental change the role of the UN in the areas of economic and social development, which in 1945 was seen to be mainly one of co-ordination. The function of the Specialized Agencies was supposed to be the development of international standards and codes supplemented to the extent necessary by research programs for the good of all, funded by voluntary contributions. Today, 32 years later, economic and social affairs are seen as a major preoccupation of the organization. A program of development assistance, on a scale undreamed of as recently as 15 years ago, forms the principal component of the enormous growth in the financial and human resources commitments of the UN itself and of the Specialized Agencies. The total of the budgets, assessed and voluntary, of the UN family of organizations, is about \$2 billion a year, and most of it goes to meeting economic and social development goals.

Even more important is the fact that the General Assembly, supported by the Economic and Social Council and the UN Conference on Trade and Development, has become the principal platform for the expression of the aspirations of developing countries for a new international economic order.

I guess it would be honest to say that most nations approach the issue of the NIEO with a mixture of concern for the common good and for self-interest, with perceptions tailored to fit the specific situation of the party concerned. The Canadian position is distinctive in that, although we clearly belong in the category of the developed, we have many characteristics shared by the developing nations. In particular, we are a raw-material producer and exporter (sharing the frustrations of the developing nations over the tariff policies of our industrialized customers that obstruct our goal of upgrading), we are a major host to transnational and foreign corporations, and we are a large importer of development capital.

It is obvious that determining Canadian policy in this situation involves the reconciliation of a host of conflicting domestic interests, and there are many who differ strongly with the policy as adopted. Under the circumstances, I shall say only that Canada participates actively in negotiations on these matters in the GATT, in UNCTAD and CIEC, which Mr. MacEachen has been copiloting and which is drawing to a conclusion in Paris. We expect a resumed session of the General Assembly on these issues in September, and you can be sure we will be there in force.

These changes that I have cited are perhaps the most important manifestations of the adaptation of the UN to the realities of the changing world. Some would, no doubt, challenge my use of the word "realities" and propose to substitute "unrealities". But of course a UN behaving in the way in which the realists would have it do would be an unreal reflection of the world we live in. The UN is, in essence, a giant retort in which one reality, the reality of the two-thirds of the world's population that lives in poverty, interacts with another — the reality of the overwhelming military and economic power held by the other third. The consequences of this interaction are unpredictable. But every member state recognizes that its vital interests are involved and that the manner and measure of its participation, for better or for worse, will affect the outcome.

This leads me to some observations on the participation of Canada in the UN. I think it is fair to say that Canadians are not a cynical people, that the Government reflected the views of the nation when it subscribed to the purposes of the United Nations Charter in 1945, and that it continues to carry the support of most of our citizens for its active involvement in the organization today.

Ever since 1945, Canadians concerned with Canada's representative in the UN have operated on the assumption that, because of the share of world resources we command, our political and cultural heritage, and our sense of values, we have an influence and a responsibility disproportionate to our size. The old phrase "middle power" has gone out of style, and the fact that we are now one of 147, and ninth-largest contributor rather than fifth, has undeniably had some effect on our place in the UN firmament. So too has the tendency for the organization to follow the path of bloc voting, which has the effect of steamrolling the efforts of individual delegations to help negotiate decisions that will be the best possible under given circumstances. But I believe I can assert with confidence that Canada is still seen as a major contributor to the UN, not only in a financial sense but also in terms of our dedication to the achievement of the purposes of the organization. In most UN organs, most of the time, Canadian representatives continue to be numbered among the most influential and effective delegations. Although this assertion (or should I say *boast*) is intended to apply throughout the UN system (including Geneva, Rome, Paris, Nairobi and Montreal, as well as New York), what follows is focused primarily on New York, since that is my particular responsibility.

If we are effective, it is certain that one important component is management. It starts with the Government's management of foreign policy in all its aspects — political, economic, aid, energy, science and technology, international law, and so on, including the identification of national goals and priorities. This is the foundation for the determination of mission priorities — and mission priorities are essential, because there is simply too much going on to cover everything in depth. The danger of allowing one's resources to get spread too thin must be a constant preoccupation of every head of mission.

Each year, we make up what we call a "country program", which identifies mission goals and gives a breakdown in man-years of the way it is planned to use our personnel resources. To cover the main areas on a continuing basis there are 12 officers,

not counting myself — three on the political side (plus a military adviser), five on economic and social issues, one on colonial problems, one on legal affairs, one on UN management and administration, and one on public affairs. Of course, we don't hesitate to use one section of the mission to reinforce another when help is needed and, during the General Assembly or when there are conferences requiring people with technical skills, we get reinforcements from Canada.

Admittedly this account may seem over detailed, but deployment of resources is the essence of management, and I thought it important to make it clear that what we do is carefully planned and subject to scrutiny by a tough interdepartmental committee in Ottawa, representing all those agencies with a stake in the product of our efforts.

Anyone who has had anything to do with the UN will appreciate that, though we can and do identify policy areas to which we attach priority, and reflect this in our use of resources, we have to operate within the constraints of the UN system and timetable. For example, from September to December, we have to deal with the 125 items of the General Assembly as they come up in the agenda, and even during the rest of the year a major determining factor about what we can do, and when, is the *Calendar of Conferences*.

I hope that what I have said thus far will indicate the ways we are responding to change in the United Nations, particularly in the main policy areas. But, before I close, I should like to flag two aspects of our work that are relevant to our subject. One is the question of the management of the UN and its budgetary and personnel aspects, including the placing of Canadians on the staff. The other is the constant activity in the field of international law, of which the best example at the moment is the Law of the Sea Conference. Perhaps I should also inform you that we have a trade commissioner on our staff to make sure that Canada gets its fair share of the business generated by the UN through its development-assistance programs.

I should like to conclude my remarks by referring back to a comment I made a few minutes ago. You will recall that I said that every member state, irrespective of its position in the organization, recognized that its vital interests were involved in the continuing negotiating process, and that the manner and measure of its participation, for better or worse, affected the outcome. I then went on to make the case that the rationale for Canadian participation was more than this — that the national sense of responsibility and concern for the goals of the organization demanded active and constructive involvement.

We live in an interdependent world of member states. Politically, economically and, indeed, in every aspect of life on this planet, we impinge one on the other. The process of adaptation and the search for collective approaches to problems that are not possible of solution in any other way can be delayed or distorted by the clash of policies, but this does not obviate the need, and it is in our own self-interest that we persist in our efforts in spite of the frustrations we may encounter. This is the credo of the Canadians who work for you at the United Nations.

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