

U.N. WATCH

Who's in Charge?

In Arthur Clarke's best science fiction novel, *Childhood's End*, the most powerful individual in the world is the secretary-general of the United Nations. A Scandinavian, of course, he is that rare creature, the truly nonpartisan world statesman.

The recent Security Council voting for a successor to Kurt Waldheim leaves a distinctly different impression of the office. The voting process itself was part play-acting and part a real concern with symbols. The man chosen for the job, Javier Perez de Cuellar of Peru, is a respected diplomat, though expected never to be troublesome to the major powers. A man who has proclaimed "caution" as his principle, he will be even less of a world shaker than Waldheim, if that is possible.

The U.N. Charter is deliberately vague on the powers and responsibilities of the secretary-general. Those who drafted it expected the office holder to find his own way. Article 99, Chapter XV reads: "The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." Article 100 enjoins the secretary-general from seeking instructions of any government in performance of his duties and calls upon all members of the U.N. to respect the international character of the Secretariat staff.

The first secretary-general, Trygve Lie, knew and used the power of his position. An extrovert given to mulling over his problems at the West Side Tennis Club, Lie accepted United States dominance of the U.N., had few more than fifty members to consider, and nothing like a Third World to contend with. Those were the days when the Security Council could order Russian troops out of Iran or French and British troops out of Syria and Lebanon...and be heeded.

There have been four secretaries-general: Lie, then Dag Hammarskjöld, U Thant, and Kurt Waldheim. Each stepped into an office of declining powers in a United Nations of lessening influence upon the major issues of world affairs. Hammarskjöld, brilliant and taciturn, supervised the formation of the U.N. Emergency Force to maintain the cease-fire between Egypt and Israel. He diagnosed a basic limitation of the U.N.: The world organization would collapse if the major powers threw in its lap all the international disputes they themselves had failed to resolve.

After Hammarskjöld's forbidding presence, U Thant was a relief to U.N. member nations. A strict Buddhist and a good caretaker, he implied by his manner that action was less important than thought, and perhaps even a bit vulgar. He came in for criticism when he agreed to remove U.N. troops from Egypt, which opened the way to another war.

Kurt Waldheim took office in a fractured U.N. of almost 150 members. The Third World had become a force to reckon with, jockeying for position and economic power with the Eastern and Western blocs. This secretary-general fashioned himself a negotiator,

not a leader, and he leaves the world body in a weaker position than when he joined it.

The new secretary-general was a compromise candidate. Through sixteen inconclusive ballots the play-acting had continued, the voters carrying on as if they really cared which of the half-dozen candidates got the job. China, for example, which kept rejecting Waldheim in favor of a Third World representative, saw this as an opportunity to wrest from the USSR the mantle of Third World protector. In Mr. Perez de Cuellar, it seems, a symbol of the smaller, poorer nations has been found.

Who's Listening

After twenty years of confused deliberations, the General Assembly in its current session approved a clear and ringing statement in support of religious freedom. General Assembly resolutions are expressions of principle, opinion, or frustration, with no power save that of influencing the minds of men, and few outside the U.N. pay any attention to them. Still, human rights groups consider any such move a new weapon in their ongoing battle.

Such earlier U.N. documents as the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sought to encourage freedom of religion along with other basic freedoms. The record of compliance has been aptly summed up by William W. Scranton, United States ambassador to the U.N. under President Ford: "The only universality that one can honestly associate with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is universal lip service."

The new declaration deals with freedom of faith alone. Yet when one considers the diverse religious and other philosophical views of the 150-plus U.N. members, agreement to such a declaration, even if written on the wind, is astonishing indeed.

The provisions of the formally titled United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief are very specific:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on grounds of religion or belief....

Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents....

Other articles in the declaration call for freedom of assembly in connection with religion, the right to publish and distribute religious publications, to solicit funds, and to train appropriate leaders. U.N. members are asked to enact legislation to accord with these rights.

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