**U.N. WATCH**

**The Thirty-Seventh**

Two major themes ran through the three months of talk, debate, and chatter that was the Thirty-Seventh Session of the General Assembly: the worldwide economic decline and the arms race, nuclear and conventional.

Curiously, in Assembly discussions of unemployment, inflation, high interest rates, and world trade it was often difficult to tell whether the speaker represented a capitalist or socialist society or reported back to a military dictatorship. Everybody asked for help: Eastern bloc countries that could not meet interest payments on debts to Western banks and Western bloc countries faced with rising unemployment and depressed markets for their products. The president of Brazil went so far as to predict global collapse and chaos unless firm steps were taken to shore up the weak economies of troubled nations. Before the General Assembly had adjourned, the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), and the Bank for International Settlements moved some of their chips around to alleviate a number of pressing problems, if only temporarily.

In the speeches about armaments there was no confusion about who was addressing the Assembly. The two giant nuclear powers went through their ritual dance, each accusing the other of deception, dishonesty, and madness. Growing public pressure forced the U.S. and the USSR to resume disarmament talks and make at least a show of negotiation.

**The Fund**

In speeches calling for drastic action to overcome the worldwide recession, few United Nations delegates ever mentioned the International Monetary Fund directly. This rarely evinces surprise, since the IMF is run by the industrialized West; although the Eastern bloc nations and the Third World look to it for help, they hardly could be expected to offer public testimonials to its effectiveness. The unfortunate result in U.N. forums is circumlocution about lending policies, world trade, dislocation in developing economies, and weighy generalizations about the need for bankers to be realistic about the nonindustrialized world.

Though neither the IMF nor the World Bank can solve the international financial crisis, matters affecting it are carefully assessed at their meetings and cautious measures sometimes are taken. At present, soft (low-interest) loans are being granted to many countries; loans are being renegotiated when interest payments cannot be made; actions are being taken to stabilize failing currencies.

**Buyer Beware**

A General Assembly draft resolution "on protection against products harmful to health and environment" was passed in December by a vote of 132-1. The resolution, which would require exporting nations to inform importing nations of the known hazardous effects of a given product, was designed particularly to monitor the shipping of dangerous pesticides and other chemicals. In the U.S., for example, many products banned for domestic use—such as aldrin and kepone—are sold in huge quantities abroad (see "Politics and Pesticides," *Worldview*, April 1982).

One provision of the resolution asks that a list be made available to all governments of chemicals banned in the country of origin. This was obviously too much for the U.S. representative, who cast the lone opposing vote.

"**No New Thing Under the Sun**"

Hundreds of soldiers died, warships were sunk, and billions of dollars were tossed away. Now the Argentine-British dispute over the Falklands/Malvinas is back at the U.N., where it had been for years. For a decade preceding the war, the two countries jostled over such matters as sovereignty for the islands, self-determination for the islanders, trade, and postal services.

Most recently, an Argentine resolution in the General Assembly called for negotiation. It was opposed by Britain, which called the move premature. "We are still burying our dead," a British official said. To the annoyance of Great Britain, the United States supported the resolution, which was adopted by the General Assembly.

**Wing Flapping**

The Thirty-Seventh Session was subject to what has become an increasingly painful exercise: Arab nations and some other Third World countries again attempted to deny Israel a seat in the General Assembly. Parallel movements in U.N. agencies brought a sharp response from U.S. Secretary of State Shultz, who said the United States would refuse financial support to any agency denying a seat to Israel. Currently, this applies to the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose activities will be seriously curtailed without Washington's funds.

**Finances**

The U.N. is always in a financial bind, but now at least it can claim its home is its own. The last mortgage payment of $1 million was recently handed to the U.S. delegate, thus completing a $65 million interest-free loan made by the U.S. Government in 1948.

The U.S., the USSR, and Great Britain met with the secretary-general in early November to discuss the rising cost of U.N. activities. The budget for 1982 was $722 million, of which the U.S. contributed 25 per cent and the Soviet Union 13 per cent. A new expense accrues with the addition of Arabic as an official language—bringing to six the number of languages in which all U.N. publications must be published.

The U.S., opposing some provisions of the Law of the Sea Treaty, has threatened to withhold its assessed contribution to the operation. Nations are allowed two years in which to sign the treaty, which was accepted by most U.N. members at a December meeting in Jamaica.

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