

## U.N. WATCH

### The 38th

The agenda of the 38th session of the General Assembly drew mild yawns from U.N. watchers when it first appeared. Very likely no one but proofreaders had the patience to read all 142 items, many of them perennials like apartheid, Namibia, arms control, refugees, hunger—all the problems that plague a troubled world.

The session was expected to open with the usual oratory, mostly for home consumption, when lightning struck. First, the Russians made a serious error, whether by accident or design, by shooting down a Korean airliner. Later, the alternate U.S. representative to the U.N. for Special Political Affairs, Ambassador Charles Lichenstein, suggested the U.N. leave New York City. President Reagan seemed to concur, then retreated slightly by asking the U.N. to consider meeting in Moscow for six months of each year.

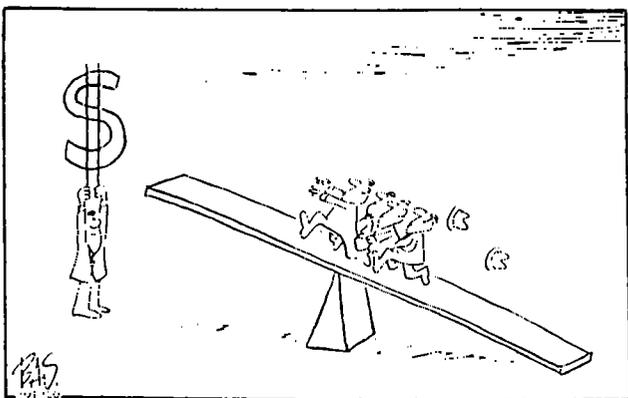
Through a complicated protocol, President Reagan was the first to address the Assembly. In the halls of the U.N. and at the plush U.N. Plaza Hotel across the street there was an atmosphere of apprehension. The president of what is still the most powerful nation in the world had condemned the Soviet Union as "evil," "immoral," "atheist," and "dishonest" *before* the downing of the Korean plane. Another violent attack on the Soviet Union would set the tone for the 38th session and, in effect, make compromises and agreements impossible.

In a stunning reversal of his proclaimed policies—military buildup, war in space, nuclear superiority, to hell with the U.N. - the president disarmed the assembled delegates by giving a statesmanlike presentation decrying the prospect of nuclear war, asking for progress in arms control and human rights, and, *mirabile dictu*, offering full support to the U.N. in its efforts, however futile, to control international insanity.

After the speech the somewhat bemused delegates pondered what they had heard. Was this new approach merely a concession preliminary to running for reelection? Would he support these principles in Congress and the White House? And who, they wondered, wrote the speech?

### The IMF

The eyes of most delegates representing the 157 member nations (now 158, with the recent admission of St. Kitts-Nevis) were also concentrated on Washington, where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was weighing decisions that could determine the future of their economies.



A positive sign was President Reagan's support for increased IMF capital to make loans to debt-ridden countries. On the negative side was a 66-23 vote in the Senate, two days after the Assembly opening, to reduce the U.S. contribution to the U.N. from 25 per cent of the budget to 21 per cent—a reduction of \$480 million over four years. Earlier, the House of Representatives passed a bill authorizing the full commitment. The bill now goes to a House-Senate conference committee, where it is likely to be defeated because prominent Republican Senators Percy and Baker oppose it.

The Washington meeting was an angry affair, quite different from the banker-like atmosphere that prevailed for decades. Some finance ministers seemed to be fighting for their lives, and indeed they may be. Food riots are taking place in South America and Asia as governments impose austerity measures that, they claim, are caused by the massive debts to international banks and foreign governments. They are hoping to be rescued by the IMF and the World Bank, but the U.S., the largest contributor to both, is balking.

The two institutions are creatures of the monetary conference held in July, 1944, at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. Both were given limited capital to support and stabilize currencies and to make soft loans to indigent nations and those devastated by war. For almost thirty years the system worked. But in recent years complex factors have wrecked the system: overblown national economies, inflation, wild increases in the cost of oil, runaway petrodollars. And the IMF has grown to 146 members.

Voting is based on the amount contributed, so the U.S. remains the most powerful member. Until recently, the Reagan administration was telling the debtor nations to pull up their socks; the proposed increase in the U.S. contribution was described as a giveaway, in the same category as Stockman "entitlements." Economists and bankers protested. Unless there was support for the world economy, the U.S. would suffer in foreign trade and more unemployment. There have been calls for another Bretton Woods.

The IMF wants an increase of \$43 billion, of which the U.S. share is \$8.4 billion—not very much in world finance. Somewhat confused about what this means, the Senate has nevertheless gone along. The House, however, is resounding with charges of anti- and procommunism.

### Meanwhile, in Vienna...

The largest U.N. installation outside New York City is the Vienna International Centre. An architectural monstrosity with rabbit-warren offices, the place is probably large enough to accommodate the entire New York headquarters. Kurt Waldheim, when he was secretary-general, hinted on occasion that the U.N. would be welcomed there.

On September 14 the Centre opened an exhibit on nuclear arms to draw "attention to the evils of the growing spiral of the arms race and the danger of a possible nuclear holocaust." Two days earlier Pope John Paul II spoke at the Centre. He said: "Man is, under God, the measure and end of all the projects we attempt in this world.... Every initiative of your agencies should be tested by the question: Does this advance the cause of man as man?" Amen.

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