

U.N. WATCH

Take It to the U.N.

The American media rarely say a word about the U.N. during its off-season—the General Assembly closes shop in December—but this winter the world organization is in the news every day. The breakdown of international negotiations, the starvation threatening large sections of Africa, heightened fear of accidental nuclear war, rising unemployment, the stagnation of most of the world's economies, and an activist secretary-general—all have thrust the U.N. into the center of seemingly intractable problems. Is this the fulfillment of Dag Hammarskjöld's greatest fear, that member-nations, unable to solve their worst problems, would dump them into the lap of the U.N., which does not have the power to enforce a solution?

There is a small library of studies—most of it unread by either politicians or statesmen—on the U.N.'s powers or lack thereof. The Charter was realistic about the organization's role in settling disputes, recognizing both the fact and the desirability of actions taken outside U.N. auspices, either bilaterally or through regional associations. There are other international sounding boards as well: the Council of Europe, the Islamic Conference, the Organization of American States. But at none of these is the entire world represented. When all else fails, nations seek redress of their grievances at the U.N.

On the U.N. agenda are such matters as the Iraq-Iran war, the South Africa-Angola-Namibia triangle, the problems of Nicaragua and El Salvador, issues concerning Israel, Lebanon, and the PLO, the USSR in Afghanistan, and, as always, American capitalist imperialism.

The most recent bid for the world's attention has been made by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau of Canada. For two months Prime Minister Trudeau was using his bona fides as a national leader to promote an international peace plan and was receiving little support from the major powers. Key elements of his plan: a ban on antisatellite weapons in space, a halt to the spread of nuclear weapons, and the convening of a high-level conference of nuclear powers—the U.S., USSR, Britain, France, and China. The individual effort brought approval by China, Italy, and Cuba, encouragement from Senator John Glenn, and is thought to have influenced the NATO plan for preventing accidental nuclear war recently presented to the Stockholm meeting on European security. But from the White House came no more than a "Godspeed."

After consultations with heads of state and foreign ministers, the prime minister presented his plan to U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar in mid-January. The next move is up to the United Nations.

On the Air

In its early days the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) worked to establish better communications among members and sought to prevent the jamming of radio broadcasts by cold war foes. The agency has been credited with some improvements in world communications, though jamming is still a common occurrence in the Eastern bloc and is practiced elsewhere as well. For much of the globe, radio remains the only means of receiving information. Illiteracy, lack of communications equipment

and the trained personnel to man it, and national leaders wary of all media, have conspired to keep newspapers and TV out of the hands of citizens in scores of U.N. member-nations.

The main item on the agenda of the January meeting of the ITU, dubbed the World Administrative Radio Conference, is the question of reapportioning the cluttered short-wave frequencies that are currently dominated by the Soviet Union and the West. The frequencies are crucial ones in long-distance broadcasting. Countries of the Third World protest the present voluntary system of apportionment that, in essence, gives the industrial nations control over short-wave broadcasting.

Obviously a problem exists, but what alternatives have been suggested? The resolutions offered by the Third World echo UNESCO's plan for a "New World Information Order." Its upshot: government control of all media.

One hundred and twelve nations are represented at the ITU meeting in Geneva. The U.S. sent a delegation of forty-four, the Soviet Union twenty-four. On opening day both countries were elected conference vice-presidents, and the stage is set for confrontation.

UNCTAD VI

The industrialized countries were summoned to Belgrade for a U.N. Conference on Trade and Development that, following so closely on their meeting at Williamsburg, Virginia, they considered a waste of time. The issue was worldwide depression and the sorry condition of the poorer countries. Only the United Nations could provide a worldwide forum.

A series of reports summarizes the views of 170 speakers. "Crisis" was a key word. According to the summary: "In 1982, for the first time in nearly 40 years, world trade declined" and, because of the steady increase in population in developing countries, per capita growth has declined as well.

After a month of discussion, conferees could not agree on a conference declaration, much less specific plans for action. UNCTAD issued a statement, which read in part: "Problems of the magnitude and complexity that the world faces today call for a global approach in which all countries must play their part."

The U.S. objected to the negative tone of that statement and announced that economic recovery was well under way. Other industrialized countries—the United Kingdom, Australia, Denmark—also had reservations about it. The conference failed to reconcile two points of view: (1) that poor nations must do more for themselves and not expect massive transfers of wealth from the rich industrialized nations and (2) that without technical help and considerable financial aid the impoverished countries will become poorer still and depress the world economy even further.

Items

For the fourth year, the General Assembly called on the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.... The U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees must now cope with military attacks on refugee camps in Asia and Africa.... One of the clearest presentations of U.S. financial contributions to the U.N. has been published by the Business Council for the U.N., New York City.

STEPHEN S. FENICHELL