

CAPS

United Nations Under Attack

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"The World Isn't Ready for the U.N." - U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater

It would be a mistake to regard the heavy offensive in the United States against the United Nations as merely the noisy efforts of lunatic extremism from the far right, receiving attention of the mass communications media out of all proportion to its numerical and political influence. It is that, but it is also suggestive of deeper currents in American life.

The attacks on the UN raise these questions: 1. What is the right wing in the United States? 2. Is it as influential as it appears to be? and, 3. Is it likely to extend its authority and succeed in destroying the United Nations along with other aims?

A study on this subject¹, which appeared in 1960, is helpful in providing answers to at least the first two of these questions. Ellsworth and Harris define the right wing in the only terms that make the events of the last several months meaningful:

"...the American Right Wing may be said to include all those who share the conviction that the relationship of government to the individual should be severely limited...Right-wingers would limit the taxing and spending powers of Congress, balance the budget at whatever cost, and stabilize present fluid procedures in the Federal Reserve Bank and the United States Treasury. They ask the complete withdrawal of government from the regulation of industry, from labor-management relations, from public utilities, from business enterprise in any field. They desire to outlaw full employment in industry, collective bargaining, the closed shop, and political education for union members. They ask the complete withdrawal of government from the supervision of health, education and welfare, and the immediate voiding of all programs dealing with social security, medical insurance, fluoridation, polio vaccine, mental health, cultural development, adult education, and federal aid to schools.... In the international field, the right wingers seek to limit the power of the president to make treaties, and the power of the State Department to issue visas and passports. They would put

¹The American Right Wing, A Report to the Fund for the Republic, Inc. by Ralph E. Ellsworth and Sarah M. Harris, University of Illinois Library School, Occasional Papers, Number 59, November 1960.

an immediate end to foreign aid, and to the participation of the United States in the United Nations, UNESCO, NATO, GATT, ILO, and any remaining Point Four Programs of Technical Assistance. They would withdraw recognition from the USSR, Israel, and most Iron Curtain Countries, and close the door to any communication with these countries or with Red China. They would ask the UN to meet elsewhere and immediately raze the building...."²

It is obvious that all right-wingers do not hold all these views. There are some who feel strongly on one or a few of these subjects, and there are others whose interests are concentrated on a different assortment of these questions. However, as Ellsworth and Harris strongly emphasize, the important link tying these sometimes diverse elements together is their common opposition to change. "Most of these people call themselves conservatives, and there seems to be no lexicographical reason to challenge their use of the term, or to water it down with neo, pseudo, or ultra. Historically, conservatives have always opposed change, and these conservatives oppose it no less."³

Defined in these terms, the right wing in America is seen to be far more extensive than it is usually imagined. In fact, Ellsworth and Harris suggest that "In some ways, conservative seems a more adequate designation than rightist or right wing, since the latter suggest to some minds a splinter group, and it appears that the literature described (by the authors in their study) does not proceed from a splinter group, but represents a large portion of American opinion."⁴

This, then, is the American Right Wing, its top layers drawn largely from privileged social groups (the military, business and hereditary) but attracting to its views large numbers of average Americans who find the intense nationalism it propagates satisfying needs whose origins

²Ibid, Page 31.

³Ibid, page 7, emphasis in the original.

⁴Ibid, emphasis in the original.

they themselves are unaware of. What is its likelihood of further success, and what are the reasons for its particular antipathy to the United Nations?

A few years ago, Robert Heilbroner, in a remarkable book, speculated that history was turning against the American Way, both at home and in the international arena. "If one thing is certain," he wrote, "It is that history's forces have reached a power utterly unlike that of our sheltered past, and that the changes those forces portend are very different from the propitious historic transformations they brought about in our past."⁵

Heilbroner detected several powerful and unfamiliar forces enveloping and disorienting people in the United States. Some of the most important of these were: 1. The weapons stalemate which has elevated the influence of non-military determinants in the East-West struggle; 2. The drive of the underdeveloped areas for rapid improvement, which of necessity veers them toward collectivist economic solutions; 3. Science and technology creating enormous new problems in everyday living in the United States; and finally, 4. The continued "blind" economic growth in the United States along traditional lines which will make effective responses to the technological, political and economic developments noted above, difficult if not impossible.

Heilbroner concluded that these forces were creating a world situation in which "the probabilities...are that 'history' will go against us for a long time, and that the trend of events, both at home and abroad, will persist in directions which we find inimical and uncongenial."⁶

⁵The Future As History by Robert Heilbroner, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959, page 175.

⁶Ibid., p. 178.

How do these forces explain the rising tide of the right-wing and its hostility to the United Nations that is today manifest in the United States? Consider first the weapons stalemate and the significance of the developing economies.

United States' Reactions To the Weapons Stalemate and the Developing Economies

The weapons stalemate--hydrogen bombs piled high on two sides of the world--has produced a wide assortment of reactions in the United States, some of which encourage or at least reflect extremist sentiment. There are, first of all, those who do not recognize that a stalemate exists and believe that American nuclear power is still unchecked and invincible. The extreme side of this position coincides with the view, frequently heard, that the absence of television (with the accompanying beer commercials and other "convincing" props) indicates Gagarin and Titov never actually circled the earth. The people who believe this also believe that Russian strength is based on a few captive German scientists, that the backward nations don't count, and "our side" has merely to indicate what it wants and take it. In this view the UN is only a meeting place for the "enemy" to expound his views and possibly infect vulnerable Americans who are unaccountably regarded as particularly susceptible to treason and subversion.

On a more sophisticated level there is a highly theoretical group of specialists, associated for the most part with the Armed Forces, who accept the fact that H-bombs are not an American monopoly, and therefore are prepared to evaluate calmly how five to fifty million American casualties may effect the ability of the economy to remain viable.⁷

⁷For this view see On Thermonuclear War by Herman Kahn

This group believes that ordinary living processes will continue, with perhaps some temporary dislocations. War as an instrument of policy, consequently, is not to be excluded. As is to be expected, this view also sustains a "positions of strength" conception, which generally prefers unilateralist decision-making to UN agreements/in policy choices facing the United States. At the moment, however, and one cannot predict how long this condition will prevail, the majority of the population is aware, if only vaguely, of the unreality of relying on nuclear warfare as an instrument of policy. But it is also uncertain about what to do next if circumstances are truly as menacing as they have been daily described for sixteen years. A strong inclination remains to talk things over with "the other side", and support for the United Nations, as a useful and practical forum for preserving peace by airing disagreements, apparently is still substantial. A Gallup Poll taken in February 1962 found that 83% of the Americans interviewed wanted the UN to be successful and believed that it was a desirable institution.

The crucial question insofar as the UN and world peace is concerned is: will this sentiment, admittedly fragile and susceptible to erosion, be preserved or will conservative attacks succeed in convincing the popular majority that unilateralist action is preferable to international discussions and negotiations? The answer may be decided, in large measure, by the definitions given and accepted, of what is the nature of the threat confronting the United States. Reconsideration of this matter has been underway for some time. Since the end of World War II, the prevalent view, presented continuously in a variety of forms in all of the organs of mass communications, has emphasized the threat of Soviet military expansionism tied to an

insatiable drive for world communist domination. More recently, the rightwing's consistent and long-held, but hitherto largely-ignored opinion (with the exception of the McCarthy era) that there is an internal threat to the United States, represented by the concealed forces of domestic subversion, has become increasingly influential in what once would have been regarded as "moderate" circles. According to this interpretation, succinctly stated several years ago by the late Senator McCarthy, America's current problems stem directly from "twenty years of treason", now updated to include the two Eisenhower administrations and the Kennedy years. The modern version of this view is that of the founder of the secret John Birch Society, Mr. Robert Welch, independent and successful candy manufacturer, who claims that "We are being insidiously, conspiratorially and treasonously led by deception, by bribery, by coercion and by fear to destroy a republic that was the envy and model for all of the civilized world."⁸

Both views, the "official" and the right-wing, agree that Communism is the chief source of the danger and the cause of America's problems. The "official" explanation directs attention to the international character of the threat. The conservative rightists insist on the domestic site of the danger. Neither outlook, though the rightist even less so, gives much weight to a third explanation of what menaces the country--^{ONE}that many other analysts have considered important. These observers, Heilbroner included, find an inability or an unwillingness of American leadership to comprehend the dimensions of the movement for social and economic justice that is racing through the underdeveloped portion of the world. This, the holders of this third view believe, makes it impossible for the rest of the population to be instructed

⁸The New York Times, February 8, 1962.

on what are the true needs of the developing societies, what are the certain consequences of failure to assist these needs (which would be present with or without the existence of the Soviet Union) and how the American society may be mobilized to effectively utilize its impressive resources for an undertaking unlike that of any preceding historical era.

Eugene Rabinowitch, the editor of The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, has written that "The only proper aim of foreign policy in the atomic age is furthering of the interests of mankind."⁹ Yet such an objective seemingly collides in the United States with a network of privatized individualistic institutions and national values that promote a very different and contradictory set of interests. American goals seem still to be modeled after the gaudy achievements fashioned by the commercial-industrial societies in the 18th and 19th centuries. But the values, ties and dependencies that such privately-wielded power enforced and required have disappeared. The military means traditionally available to compel that kind of respect is undermined by countervailing nuclear power as well as by massive popular resistance movements. Perhaps Arnold Toynbee has best described this situation:

"It is ironic and tragic, in an age in which the whole world has come to be inspired by the original and authentic spirit of Americanism, America herself should have turned her back on this, and should have become the arch-conservative power in the world after having made history as the arch-revolutionary one."

Toynbee finds that "In present day America...the affluent majority is striving desperately to arrest the irresistible tide of change. It is attempting this impossible task because it is bent on conserving the

⁹The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September 1960.

social and economic system under which this comfortable affluence has been acquired."¹⁰

Seen this way, it is understandable why the shadings of thought which have customarily distinguished "familiar" conservatism from vituperative rightwing expression have become almost invisible on questions affecting the business system. Government action for social objectives is regarded with horror equally by Detroit auto magnates, oil kings, the American Medical Association and any one of the one thousand voluntary rightwing organizations that Ellsworth and Harris found to exist in 1958.

Though the conservative alliance has successfully prevented even the mildest modifications in the socio-economic order, it is not at all evident that existing arrangements can meet the non-military tasks of reacting to the challenge of a competing social system, of assisting the impoverished two-thirds of the world, and of handling effectively the domestic consequences of a continuing scientific and technological revolution which is affecting every feature of the national existence. American power, exercised traditionally, at home and abroad, apparently finds itself thwarted. Alternative national utilization of the country's still potent resource capabilities for non-traditional international and domestic social objectives is entirely unfamiliar and even contradictory to American habits and prevailing institutional patterns. The conservatives are working vigorously to keep things this way.

For a variety of reasons, the United Nations offers a fine target against which to discharge the hostile impulses produced by this growing frustration. Unable to comprehend the power shifts that have occurred on a world scale in the last twenty years, the critics of the

¹⁰New York University Alumni News, January 1962, page 3.

United Nations regard that organization as uniquely responsible for the many international constraints on American power. It is accused and reviled for "holding back" MacArthur in Korea, for preventing Castro from getting his "come-uppance", and for creating a hostile environment for American bomb-testing. In addition, the UN has censured the United States' closest anti-Communist allies in Western Europe for their continuous footdragging on colonial questions. The UN also has recommended substantial international economic assistance, internationally administered, to assist the backward societies.

In these instances and others, the UN inevitably has brought down on its head the criticism of almost every element in American conservatism. Doctrinaire nationalists bitterly refuse to recognize any attenuation of state sovereignty, regardless of the interdependency of the age. Former Major-General Edwin A. Walker explains his resignation from the United States Army in these words: "I could no longer serve in uniform and be a collaborator with the release of United States sovereignty to the United Nations." The UN's intercessions in Algeria, Angola, the Congo and West Iria arouse not only Western European conservatives but their American supporters, sympathizers, military allies and business associates. How far this sentiment extends beyond the far right is illustrated by the statement of the Republican National Committee, criticizing Robert Kennedy, the president's brother, for visiting Indonesia. The policy-making body of the Republican Party declared: "What can be gained by Kennedy's gratuitous gesture toward the Indonesians---especially at this time---except further straining of U.S. ties with the Netherlands?...another long step in the wrong direction by patronizing an alleged neutral at the expense of a known

NATO ally-when the 'neutral' is threatening the known ally with communist arms."¹¹

Finally, believers in economic orthodoxy, and they are numerous and influential in the United States, find no precedents for the levying of internal taxes which are diverted by the Government to foreigners. This is regarded as just another excuse to broaden still further the role of government, already considered in these circles as unnecessarily huge. Furthermore, it is noted that another function of private enterprise is usurped when intergovernmental capital transfers are substituted for a private international flow of investment. On this last point there is a wide consensus that the UN, under the special urging of its "impoverished majority", is imposing collectivist techniques on the donor nations, whereas the inclinations of the recipient states in this direction are already recognized and deplored.

Seen from this perspective, it is not likely that the course of events will reverse sentiments such as these. The tide of unattended social crises in the United States can be relied on to produce deeper frustrations and additional legions of confused and angry citizens. Will the Kennedy Administration move to reduce the domestic and international tensions which increase the influence of conservatism and encourage its offensives? The time is still early and the evidence is not all in, but the first indications are not reassuring.

It is undeniable that the Administration still registers its warm formal approval of the world organization. President Kennedy's State of the Union message on January 11, 1962 declared: "Our instrument and our hope is the United Nations, and I see little merit in the impatience of those who would abandon this imperfect world

¹¹Associated Press, February 9, 1962.

instrument because they dislike our imperfect world,"¹² But against the Administration's expressed support of the UN and its willingness to subscribe to one half of the emergency UN bond issue can be placed other actions which conceivably could threaten the long-term survival of the organization.

The UN and the Arms Race

One of these is the arms race which is hardly compatible with the aim of strengthening the UN as an organization for effective peace-making. The current Administration has "added about fourteen billion dollars to the planned plateau of the defense program approved by the Eisenhower Administration", observes the military editor of the New York Times¹³, and this has been accomplished in little more than one year's time. This action is quickly reciprocated by the Soviets. The immediate effect is an increase of tension, and though one cannot judge the psychological effects in the USSR, in the United States it is safe to say that the rightwing nationalist position is greatly strengthened. Higher levels of armaments encourages those who believe only in building a "position of strength" and who are inclined to feel that "negotiations are appeasement."

The UN and Regional Blocs

Regionalism is another Administration policy which leads eventually to the reduction of the UN's effectiveness. The belief that smaller, more "homogeneous" groupings of states can be substituted for the larger, less unanimous UN as a force for peace has been a program of

¹²The New York Times, January 12, 1962.

¹³Hanson Baldwin, in The New York Times, February 5, 1962.

action as well as the philosophy of successive American governments. It is receiving increasing emphasis in Kennedy's Administration, spurred vigorously in Latin America (Organization of American States, OAS) and in Western Europe (OECD). Its supporters include some surprising names and the wide extent of agreement in this policy is another indication of the inroads of conservative thought on the national leadership. Senator Barry Goldwater, for instance, on the subject of the UN, told an audience on January 17, 1962 "Let's forget the whole thing and join up with our allies and induce the neutrals to join us. The world isn't ready for the U.N."

Another contender for the leadership of the Republican Party, New York State's Governor Nelson Rockefeller expressed a similar opinion. Before a Harvard University audience, Rockefeller said the UN "Lacks the strength to master or control the forces that it confronts" and to fill "the serious political vacuum" that exists, regional confederations of free nations are desirable--"in the Western Hemisphere, and in the Atlantic Community, perhaps eventually in Africa, the Middle East and Asia."¹⁴ More revealing of the way the wind has been blowing is that the opening gun in the current onslaught on the UN was fired by an internationalist and a top figure in the foreign policy formulation of the Democratic Party. Months before the Indian incorporation of Goa and the action in Katanga precipitated outbursts against the UN in a sizable section of the press, the chairman of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee addressed himself to the UN problem. Rejecting the Russian proposal for a Troika-style administration for the UN, Senator William Fulbright wrote:

¹⁴The New York Times, February 10, 1962.

"Instead of engaging in an arid and irrelevant exercise in legalities, we would be far better advised to seek feasible means of building a cohesive community of free nations. This objective should be pursued as far as possible within the United Nations. In large measure, however, it must be pressed outside of the UN., through instrumentalities that reflect a limited but real community of common interests." (emphasis added)

Fulbright concluded: "The question is how and whether a dynamic 'concert of free nations' can be put together. It is clear that the United Nations, although it was designed to form just such a concert, has fallen far short of the hopes which attended its creation. We must look elsewhere for a system that can unify the forces of freedom effectively."¹⁵(Emphasis added)

According to Fulbright, a viable system of collective security requires three preconditions to succeed: 1. "a status quo on which the principal powers agree"; 2. "overwhelming force" in the hands of those who support the status quo; and 3. "a high degree of political and moral solidarity among the great powers."¹⁶

None of these existed at the end of World War II, Fulbright said, and the UN was fated thereby never to be an effectual body. Senator Fulbright's search for the status quo and the "overwhelming force" with which to defend it, helps to explain why the right wing movement has become so influential in the United States. After all, what other segment of the society is so wedded to the status quo? It is only natural that when the strongest concern of all conservatives, the preservation of the status quo, becomes national policy, conservative thinking receives an enormous stimulus. It would also seem that a poor sense of the world's realities, usually associated with the right wing, is reflected in the current quest for an agreement to certify longstanding relationships between the strong and the weak, the developed and the undeveloped, the raw material suppliers and the

¹⁵Foreign Affairs, October 1961, Vol. 40, No. 1, "For a Concert of Free Nations".

industrial consumers, the high consumption and the marginal societies, the order-givers and the order-receivers.

Resumption of the quest for the status quo, this time in the company of a few sympathetic nations, which is the explicit message of the Fulbright and Rockefeller analyses, and echoed with less finesse by Senator Goldwater, seemingly retains these unrealistic qualities. Unwillingness to function, except formally, in the UN is tantamount to escapist behavior in the face of admittedly new historical conditions.

The UN As An Anti-Communist Instrument

A third source of danger to the survival of the UN is the Administration's defense and justification of the world body before Congress and the people as an instrument of anti-communism. President Kennedy's message to Congress (January 30, 1962) urging support of the emergency bond issue, emphasized that "Failure to act would serve the interests of the Soviet Union..."¹⁶ The same theme has been developed frequently by both the Assistant Secretary of State Harlan Cleveland and the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson.

The danger of such a defense is that though it may temporarily achieve its objective and induce the Congress and the people to support the UN as an anti-Communist weapon, historical forces are almost certain to push the organization closer to the positions espoused by the underdeveloped and newly-emergent nations. Those who support the UN only to the extent that it is anti-communist and "pro-western" are likely to suffer continual disillusionment which ultimately can benefit only the rightwing. The question of the seating of the Mainland Communist Chinese Government is illustrative. The U.S. News and World Report, a conservative mass weekly offers a hint of what may be

¹⁶The New York Times, January 31, 1962.

expected. After informing its readership that the recent denial of a seat to Communist China was a "victory" for the United States, it warned that "Many observers feel that this issue, alone (if decided the other way) might wreck the United Nations."¹⁷ Put differently, if, as is entirely probable, the UN should reverse itself next year and vote for the admission of Red China, a significant number of Americans would be so shocked that they would acquiesce in the demise of the world organization.

The gravest threat to the UN arises not at this juncture, therefore, when it still possesses the support of the Administration, but in the future "crises" that are the inevitable accompaniments of a rapidly changing world. The American public is neither realistically informed about or prepared for these changes. It is being increasingly harangued by rightwing groups who warn that these changes are the results of conspiracy. Its mood if and when some unexpected, but predictable shifts occur can only be surmised at this time but there are already enough causes for concern.

Conclusion

The United States, rich beyond the dreams of most of the members of the United Nations, moves uneasily in a deepening domestic social crisis, the consequence of maturing technological and scientific breakthroughs, an indigenous population explosion and antiquated socio-economic institutions which impede effective decision-making.

The national mood, observers find, is turning away from its historical optimism and the confusion and disarray feed an increasingly

¹⁷The U.S. News and World Report, January 1, 1962.

vocal and well-financed conservatism. In this setting, proposed "solutions" offer stronger doses of the very medicine which has contributed to the illness---more privatized decision-making, fewer systematic plans, less interference with the individual self-interest. Powerful private channels of public opinion-making are striving with success to convey the impression that these remedies are not only beneficial but "moderate." The recommendation of the domestic prescription to the international scene finds its first application to the United Nations. From a conservative viewpoint, the UN is the perfect sacrificial victim. It represents collective action. It symbolizes international interdependency. It emphasizes planned economic solutions to social and political problems. It includes and gives a hearing to the many weak as well as the mighty few. These characteristics the American Right Wing finds obnoxious domestically and certainly sees no reason to regard favorably when applied internationally. Seen from the United States, the future of the United Nations rests primarily on the ability of the American society to satisfactorily and humanistically control its own destinies. Only if this is attainable can the United Nations expect enduring American support. At the moment the prospects are not good.