
United Nations

Garcia transforms General Assembly

by Our U.N. Correspondents

The 40th Anniversary Session of the United Nations has been transformed by the powerful intervention of Peruvian President Dr. Alan García. His Sept. 23 speech threw down the gauntlet to debtor and creditor nations alike, as well as to the U.N. bureaucracy itself. Instead of being ping ponged between the hard line of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the U.S. State Department, on the one hand, and the smiling blackmail and smothering supranationality of the U.N., on the other, the indebted nations have been challenged by García to reassert their national sovereignty.

As a result, national delegations are finally discussing a real solution to the international debt crisis—a solution dictated by reality, not by George Shultz or the U.N. mafiosi.

Until the Israeli attack on the PLO camp at Tunis temporarily displaced it, the discussion of the international debt crisis, as defined by García, dominated the General Assembly speeches of the developing-sector countries, and was acknowledged by virtually every spokesman from the advanced sector—including those who represent the financial oligarchy.

British Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe identified the Third World debt crisis as one of the two leading issues facing the world. That assessment was echoed in speeches ranging from those of Luxembourg to those of Burkina Faso (Upper Volta).

Demands 'joint action'

This, in itself, is a measure of the transformation wrought by García—and by realities. Heretofore, the international bankers, acting primarily through the United States, have insisted that discussion of debt and financial matters was not "appropriate" to the U.N. General Assembly. Such discussions were better left to the "experts" at the IMF and World Bank, where concerns about pandemics, starvation, and national sovereignty do not interfere with the bottom line—debt collection and continued economic control.

Now, both the Non-Aligned Group and the Third World's Group of 77 are threatening to push the debt issue onto the

floor of the General Assembly. The Non-Aligned Group at the U.N. has written a draft document that calls into question the policies of the IMF for the first time. The Group of 77 is being pushed by the Peruvian delegation to adopt a communiqué which addresses the political nature of the debt crisis and embraces García's concept of capping debt repayment at a certain percentage of export earnings.

Speaking to the Group of 77 Foreign Ministers on Oct. 3, Peru's U.N. ambassador, Carlos Alzamora, lambasted the Group for its failure to increase the level of South-South cooperation, and demanded that it rectify that failure by taking "joint action" on the issue of the debt.

At the same Group of 77 meeting, the Mexican ambassador urged the convocation of the "International Conference on Money and Finance for Development," first proposed and organized by Indira Gandhi, the late Prime Minister of India. The Gandhi conference is increasingly becoming the focus of attention among developing-sector nations.

While all this is going on, the U.S. State Department has not been idle. Secretary of State Shultz wasted no time in trying to club the Third World into line. Following a private meeting between Shultz and García, Shultz instructed his State Department to release an incredible description of the meeting, declaring that Shultz had "rebuked" García for his speech.

Whether something like that occurred, or Shultz simply says that it occurred is not known. But some sources say that the "rebuke" may have gone in the other direction, as García instructed Shultz in the proper manner in which to treat a President of Peru, punctuating the lesson with some table pounding.

But Shultz is trying the same tactics on others, having set up a mini-State Department in the U.N. Plaza Hotel and conducting non-stop meetings with heads of state and foreign ministers. Henry Kissinger and the Council on Foreign Relations crowd are also very much in evidence, alternating the carrot approach of receptions and galas with the stick of threats and blackmail.

At the same time, the United States is promising a "new approach" to the international debt crisis, to be delivered at the IMF annual meeting in Seoul, South Korea. The "new approach" is to increase the capital of the World Bank, so that it can more effectively take over the policing role of the now politically discredited IMF. One delegate reported that, while many Third World delegations are keeping their counsel and watching the Seoul meeting, most recognize the U.S. approach for what it is, "an effort to take the wind out of the sails of the García proposal."

What still remains to be accomplished at the U.N., however, is for other nations and national leaders to show the kind of "will to action" exhibited by García. No one has yet identified the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, ravaging Africa and spreading to the rest of the world, as the kind of civilization-threatening spur to other national leaders to break the rules, as President García has.