

FOCUS ON AFRICA : THE 15TH U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

WINIFRED F. COURTNEY

*Referent on Africa for the United States Section of the
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*

THIS was a tense and emotional General Assembly—it is to resume again in March—with the life of the United Nations Organization itself hanging by a hair in the Congo, and Africa all-pervading. Although some 'colonial' items (Apartheid—and the treatment of Indians—in South Africa; the Trusteeship Council Report; Eisenhower's Program for Africa) have been left over till Spring, the completed session chalked up its only important decisions on the colonial board.

World interest in the colonial problem—there are still sixty million people in Africa alone under some form of white domination—was clearly at its height.

In the opening debate by a dazzling array of world leaders, four pre-occupations were apparent: disarmament—as yet barely touched upon; the closing of the economic gap between the haves and the have-nots (possible only with an end to arming); an orderly end to colonialism; and the revision of the U.N. structure so as to reflect its expanded membership. On these inter-related needs, all could agree. The emotion and the sordid wrangling came in the details, the methods, the timing, and in the assessment and suspicion of motives.

The gale that swept from Africa down East Forty-Second Street brought just and welcome representation as well as the stresses of change. 17 new member nations—only Cyprus amongst them is non-African—swelled the independent-African force from 9 to 25, the Afro-Asian group to 46, and U.N. membership to 99.

The African States, however, notably on the Congo issue, divided into groups sometimes intensely bitter against one another. Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Guinea, and the United Arab Republic strongly supported the claims of Lumumba. The new nations of the French Community tended to support France (9 opposed or abstained on the Algeria resolution). The re-

mainder fell between these two alignments, tending to be 'moderate' and independent. The issue of Mauritania—claimed by Morocco, granted independence by France after the U.N. had failed to arrive at any resolution in the matter, and vetoed for membership by the Soviet Union when membership was not granted to Outer Mongolia—caused further friction and divided Tunisia and Morocco. The Cold War had come to Africa, though Africans continued to maintain unity on all other colonial issues.

It was not the Cold War, though, that most concerned the Africans and Asians. 'Neo-colonialism' was the key-note of African pre-occupation, in the Congo and everywhere else. President Nkrumah of Ghana stressed this most forcefully in his U.N. address. The African States fear most of all the retention or development by the West of bases, of military commitments, and of economic interests in Africa. Does Europe really intend to keep Africa weak and divided and dependent? Audible in the U.N. corridors was the feeling in Nigeria against military involvement with Britain; the fear of new bases being set up in Africa, and of nuclear tests conducted there; the vehement distrust of Belgium's role in Katanga and of Western support of Mobutu; the war in Algeria; the intransigence of Portugal, supported by N.A.T.O. votes; the intransigence of South Africa, supported by N.A.T.O. abstentions on South West Africa. There was reason enough for fear, which the United States and colonial power voting record only intensified. If the West is as well-intentioned as it claims to be, it must allay this fear, and quickly.

The '*New York Herald Tribune*' of December 22, 1960, under the headline—"Soviets Seen as Gainers as U.N. Assembly Ends"—reported: ". . . On the issue of debating the admission of Communist China . . . the Soviet bloc mobilized thirty-four votes, which is probably the high Soviet point in U.N. voting history. Some believe it may succeed next year in securing the simple majority required to win a debate on this issue",—against the United States, of course! As Nigeria's far from naïve Mr. Jaja Wachuku, his wings still damp from the colonial cocoon, expressed it on television (I paraphrase): "We understood that a democratic forum was intended to discuss important issues; we found that the question of debating the admission of China was up for a vote, so we voted to discuss it"—to the shock and surprise of many. Truth was certainly on Mr.

Wachuku's side; the nuclear hazard in isolating China apart, it is surely far more dangerous that one nation—the United States—should be able to force a majority against that majority's better judgment than that China and every other nation should be admitted to the U.N. There has been talk here of 'weighting' U.N. votes in future. I cannot see this as a practical possibility either in terms of population or of 'wealth', since little nations are not going to vote themselves into permanent second-class status with their eyes open.

The United States stuck close to N.A.T.O. and abstained on every controversial colonial vote in 1960. The year before, in the person of Mr. Mason Sears, it backed the Africans all the way on South West Africa (and in this it persisted—except on one very important resolution—in 1960); previously, in 1958, Mr. George Harrison was responsible for bringing U.S. support at last to the resolution against South African apartheid. The sole point of interest in the otherwise altogether lamentable 1960 record was that the U.S. *delegation* in some instances was almost openly chagrined at the votes it had to cast on State Department directive. This, of course, only made matters worse, for the Afro-Asians. My ears still ring with the reproaches of an ordinarily cordial 'neutralist' delegate, asked to comment on this year's American U.N. performance. He fears that the new American Administration arrives too late—its advent, if promising, has seemed interminable—and I only hope he is not right. "We used to have reservations when the Soviet Union called you 'imperialists' and 'colonialists'," he said to me bitterly, "but we count you among them from now on."

Unless the Rusk-Williams-Stevenson team can very rapidly work some miracles, the United States may really have cooked its turkey in Africa. The folly of the power struggle was never more nakedly exposed than at this General Assembly: the West appeared blinded to the real needs of the world in a way that can only be suicidal.

The Soviet Union probably misjudged majority feeling with the unparliamentary tactics of Mr. Khrushchev and his attacks on the U.N. structure (all small States, of course, want the U.N. to endure). Its refusal to allow broader Afro-Asian representation on the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council—by expanding their membership—until China should be admitted, together with its Mauritania veto were, on the other hand, calculated risks. If these appear debits to balance the score, the

score does not really balance, since Soviet-bloc speeches and votes were strongly in support of African sentiment and were generally welcomed among Afro-Asians. The U.S.S.R. does appear to understand most of the real needs of the world and be ready to adapt to them, wisely or cunningly, depending on your point of view. The votes from now onwards are most likely to swell the side of those who respond best to these needs, regardless of ideology.

The Secretary-General, Mr. Hammarskjöld, managed to defend his Congo policy with skill, but his great value as a peacemaker has been seriously, probably permanently, undermined. Here the West, having allowed Belgium to pursue its ultimately disastrous colonial policies, has only itself to blame. In the face of this proven and catastrophic Congo blindness, the continued myopia of N.A.T.O. is the harder to explain.

The U.N. faced, and still faces, a financial crisis. Contributions to Congo expenses—refused by the Soviet bloc and others—were made “obligatory”, and a way was found to meet the ten million dollars a month required until March. The going from there onwards, however, is still in doubt.

The Record

It seems worth while to analyze in some detail the voting on the most important African political issues. The following nations have been chosen as a kind of cross-section: the U.K. and Portugal (N.A.T.O.-colonial); the U.S. and Canada (N.A.T.O.); Ireland (European independent); Ghana and Tunisia (‘established’ African States); the Ivory Coast (formerly French, newly independent); India (Asian neutralist); South Africa; the U.S.S.R. (and bloc).

COLONIALISM: Mr. Khrushchev presented a Declaration on Colonialism to the General Assembly, which demanded immediate and unconditional independence for all colonies. This was defeated in favour of a 43-nation Afro-Asian resolution urging immediate steps to the same end, but naming no deadline. Passed 89-0-9. YES: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: None. ABSTAIN: Portugal, South Africa, U.K., U.S. (and Spain, Australia, Belgium, Dominican Republic, France).

Mrs. Zelma Watson George, Negro member of the U.S. delegation, rose to her feet and applauded the passage of this

resolution, stating to reporters that she believed her whole delegation wanted to vote for it and that her last-minute appeal to Eisenhower had been fruitless. The U.S.S.R. declared itself well-satisfied with the outcome and made the most of the U.S. defection ("a handful of colonialists led by the United States"), which has been sharply criticized by Senator John Sherman Cooper, a Republican, and others here.

PORTUGUESE AFRICA: Portugal has repeatedly stated that she has no colonies, only "overseas provinces"—a big, happy family. Last year there was majority joy when a U.N. Committee of Six—Netherlands, U.K., U.S., India, Mexico, and Morocco—agreed to draw up a set of principles "which should guide Member States" in deciding what were the colonies on which they had the obligation to report annually to the U.N. A set of twelve very adequate principles was produced last September.

Resolution I approved these principles and *decided* that "the principles as annexed to this resolution should be applied in the light of the facts and circumstances of each case to determine whether or not an obligation exists to transmit information . . ." Passed 69-2-21. YES: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia. NO: Portugal, South Africa. ABSTAIN: U.K., U.S., U.S.S.R.

Resolution II pointed to specific Portuguese colonies and *declared* "that an obligation exists on the part of the Government of Portugal to transmit information . . . concerning these territories . . . without further delay." Passed 68-6-17. YES: Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: Portugal, South Africa. ABSTAIN: Canada, U.K., U.S.

SOUTH WEST AFRICA: Feeling ran equally high on this issue; fifteen years of U.N. attention has accomplished nothing for this League of Nations mandate, ward of South Africa. However, on November 4, 1960, Ethiopia and Liberia had brought the case of South Africa's possible violation of her mandate to the International Court for a judgment. Eight petitioners were present (including Michael Scott), some of whom had escaped the territory under threat of imprisonment. Britain suffered severe and open criticism for her voting record on South West Africa; even Ireland's expressed caution over Resolution VI stimulated bitter attack.

Mr. Eric Louw's motion to adjourn debate because the matter

was *sub judice* (although he would not commit South Africa to abide by the Court's decision) was defeated 1-67-11 in Committee, 1-82-9 in Plenary. YES: South Africa. NO: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S., U.S.S.R. ABSTAIN: Portugal, U.K. (*South Africa boycotted the debate after the defeat of this motion.*)

Resolution II urged political freedom in South West Africa, and an end to the political deportation and imprisonment of Africans. Passed 84-0-7. YES: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S., U.S.S.R. NO: None. ABSTAIN: Portugal, U.K. South Africa not voting.

Resolution III *commended* Ethiopia and Liberia for their Court action. Passed 86-0-6. YES: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S., U.S.S.R. NO: None. ABSTAIN: Portugal, U.K. South Africa not voting.

Resolution IV *requested* South Africa to seek the assistance of U.N. Specialized Agencies in alleviating conditions within the territory. Passed 89-0-0. South Africa not voting.

Resolution V expressed concern over South West Africa's 'Sharpeville' at Windhoek on December 10, 1959, when 11 Africans were killed by police and many injured. It requested compensation for the Africans and punishment for the guilty. Passed 83-0-7, no roll call.

Resolution VI, reviewing the history of the South West African item, *invited* the U.N. "Committee on South West Africa, in addition to its normal tasks, to go to South West Africa immediately to investigate the situation prevailing in the Territory and to ascertain and make proposals to the General Assembly on: (a) The conditions for restoring a climate of peace and security; (b) The steps which would enable the indigenous inhabitants of South West Africa to achieve a wide measure of internal self-government designed to lead them to complete independence as soon as possible." The Committee was requested to report to the resumed session in the Spring. Passed 78-0-15. YES: Ghana, India, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: None. ABSTAIN: Canada, Ireland, Portugal, U.K., U.S. South Africa not voting.

THE CONGO—SEATING THE KASAVUBU DELEGATION: All African States but nine of the formerly French territories opposed or abstained on the resolution to seat the Kasavubu delegation as representative of the Congo central government,

which was widely considered (and resented) as the work of the United States, wielding its safe majority. A Conciliation Commission of African and Asian States had been set up by the earlier—Emergency—Assembly, and feeling was strong that it should have been allowed to do its work in the Congo before any “freezing” of current divisions. The West’s fear of ‘Communism’ in the person of Lumumba over-rode all other considerations, but its premature action may prove an irreversible mistake in an Africa which so strongly distrusts Belgium and identifies Kasavubu at present with Belgium’s effort to retain its Congo interests. The Security Council, and later the Assembly, failed to pass any resolution aimed at widening the U.N. mandate in the Congo. For the first time the U.S. could not—by one vote—rally its former sure two-thirds majority for her own (and the U.K.’s) resolution. The Congo item remains on the agenda.

Credentials Committee recommendation for seating Kasavubu: Passed 53-24-19. YES: Ivory Coast, Portugal, South Africa, U.K., U.S. NO: Ghana (Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Togo, U.A.R.), India, U.S.S.R. ABSTAIN: Canada, Ireland, Tunisia. The African States divided 9-6-7, with Upper Volta absent, and Nigeria not voting because of her position as Conciliation Commission Chairman.

ALGERIA: A paragraph *deciding* to hold a U.N.-supervised referendum within Algeria, urged by the F.L.N., was defeated in Plenary after Committee passage. The remainder of the resolution, *recognizing* the right of Algerians to independence without partition, and U.N. responsibility in the matter of self-determination, achieved a two-thirds majority for the first time in three years. (In debate the U.S. and N.A.T.O. were once more considered heavily responsible for enabling France to pursue the war.) Passed 63-8-27. YES: Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: Ivory Coast, Portugal, South Africa. ABSTAIN: U.K., U.S.

RUANDA-URUNDI: This strife-torn, Belgian-administered Trust Territory, bordering on the Congo and due for early independence, was the object of the serious concern of the Afro-Asian States, which summarily rejected all N.A.T.O. amendments to their resolutions.

Resolution I asked for a delay in forthcoming elections and a “full and unconditional” political amnesty, and set up a three-

nation commission closely to supervise the elections and the progress of the territory. Passed 61-9-23. YES: Ghana, India, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: Portugal, South Africa, U.K. ABSTAIN: Canada, Ireland, U.S.

Resolution II asked the return of the exiled Mwami (King) of Ruanda to his country, his future status to be the subject of a referendum. Passed 50-24-19. YES: Ghana, India, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, U.S.S.R. NO: Canada, Portugal, South Africa, U.K., U.S. ABSTAIN: Ireland.

PORTUGAL FOR SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT: The most gratuitously disturbing move of the season was the West's effort to give Portugal a seat on the Security Council. Voting was by secret ballot, and a two-thirds majority was required; on the final ballot on which she appeared (the ninth), Portugal received 46 votes! Under pressure, one presumes, she withdrew then in favour of Ireland, and Ireland deadlocked with Liberia 45-45 on the thirteenth ballot. The two candidates then agreed that Liberia should serve in 1961 and Ireland in 1962. "Why did the West choose this of all years to support Portugal?" a young African student asked me. I only wish I knew.

The Future

So that was the broad picture. Of course the West does not want to see the Soviet Union gaining ascendancy in Africa, though it could hardly do better than it is doing at present if it planned such a future as a matter of policy. Free and sovereign States must be treated as free and sovereign States, not as trenches in the Cold War. May one respectfully submit to the new United States Administration that "We must stop the Communists at every point in Africa" is just no substitute for a sound Africa policy? The N.A.T.O. alliance must be seriously re-appraised. Is not the friendship and trust of all Africa, Asia, and South America the greater bulwark today? The most crucial foreign policy decision which the United States has now to make is to stand on what we claim so strenuously to believe; to offer the new Africa—and Asia and South America—co-operation in their enormous social, economic, and political needs *as they see them*, not paranoiac pressures against an "enemy" ideology; world-mindedness, not blind battle fever; the forces that build, not those which destroy.