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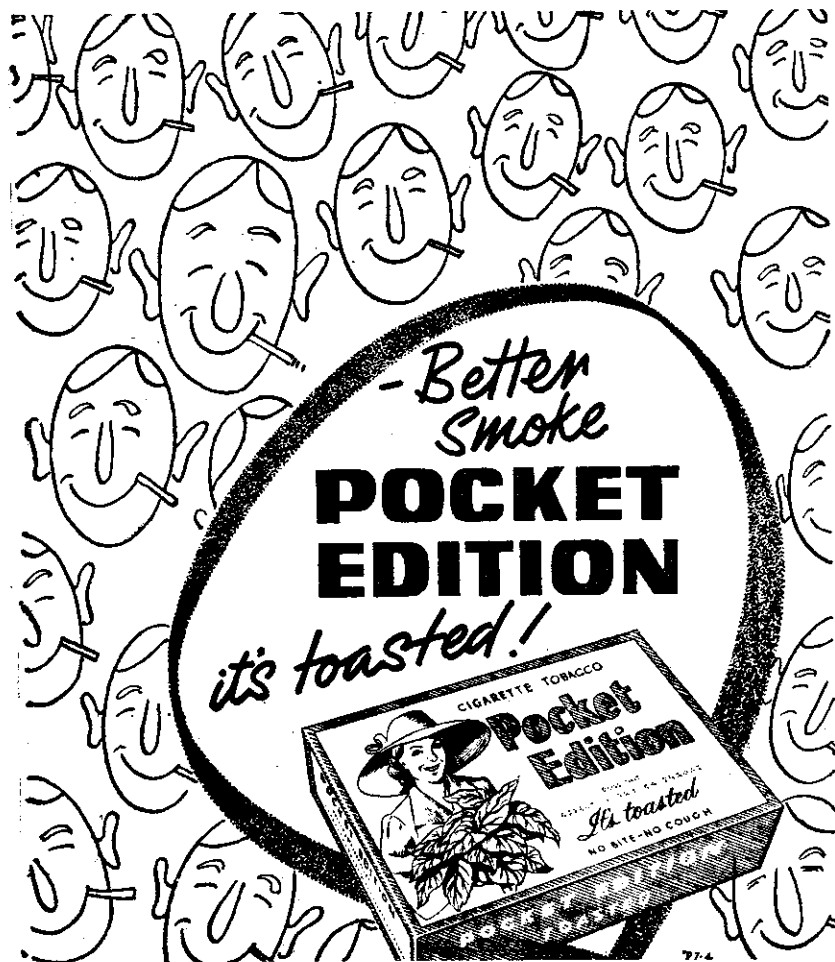
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LOOKOUT

Why the UN Still Counts

IT would probably be true to say that the tastes of newspaper readers in New Zealand govern, to a large extent, the choice of material by editors. It's a somewhat disturbing commentary on our tastes for international news that so little space is devoted to the United Nations. Except for one or two news items which, as you would expect, relate to tensions between the East and West, the newspapers this week and in previous weeks have had nothing to tell us about the United Nations. It is difficult to realise that the General Assembly of the United Nations, the nearest approach to a world parliament, is now in session at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. We only hear about it when some controversial issue is raised; for the rest, it does its work, so far as we are concerned, in undisturbed obscurity. If this were an organisation on which New Zealand were not represented, there might be some justification for this lack of interest. But on three of the four main organs of the United Nations, New Zealand has a seat. We are represented in the General Assembly, as are all member nations; because of our commitments in Western Samoa, we are a member of the Trusteeship Council; and we have the privilege of being represented on the Security Council.

Support for the United Nations and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter have been stated again and again by Government spokesmen to be one of the chief cornerstones of New Zealand's foreign policy. In the recent debate in the House on international affairs, Mr. Webb, the Minister of External Affairs, said that it would be fatal to by-pass the United Nations and that any steps that New Zealand takes must be within the ambit of the United Nations. We are continually being reminded in the newspapers of the importance of other factors in our foreign policy, like the maintenance of the link with the Commonwealth and the United States of America. This is right and proper, but it is a matter for regret that much less significance is attached to the United Nations. This may be explained in part, I suppose, by the feeling that the United Nations is not able to work effectively because of the obstructive tactics and intransigent policies of the Soviet Union and her allies. But such an attitude overlooks two considerations of real importance.

The first is that the lack of Soviet co-operation has little effect upon the work of the organisation, except in the Security Council, where all the permanent members must concur in decisions on matters of substance. This factor, of course, accounts for the decline of the Security Council which, since the epic debates on the Korean question in 1950, has rarely met. But in other bodies of the United Nations decisions are usually reached by a vote of simple majority, or sometimes of a two-thirds majority. It is, therefore, ridiculous to suggest that

Extracts from a recent commentary on the international news broadcast from the main National Stations of the NZBS

the attitude of representatives from the Communist countries prevents these bodies from reaching effective decisions. Nor can there be any validity in the suggestion that one more member State to the Communist side will make any material difference. If the Chinese Communist Government were to replace that of Chiang Kai-shek as the proper representative of the State of China in the United Nations, what difference would there be?

In the Security Council there would be two permanent Communist members instead of one at present, but that would not make it any more difficult to reach decisions on matters of substance. Nor would it jeopardise the position of Britain, France or the United States of America. So long as no decisions could be reached without the concurrence of each of these States they would have little to fear from an increase of one in the voting power of that body. In the other organs of the United Nations, the addition of China to the Communist bloc would obviously mean only an extra vote. Thus in the General Assembly instead of the steady five votes out of 60 which are always cast in favour of any Soviet proposal, there would now be six. Even if all the Communist countries in the world were to be admitted to the United Nations, their total voting strength would be 13 out of 68, and that is without taking into account the dozen or more non-Communist countries which have been patiently waiting since 1946 to be admitted into the world organisation.

The other factor which, in my view, is overlooked by critics of the effectiveness of the United Nations is that it provides a convenient forum which is always available for conferring and negotiating with the Communist countries, not on political matters only, but also on the multitude of questions of an economic and social nature that are discussed in one or other of the organs of the United Nations. This is all done within the framework of the world community, and the policies of East and West are not artificially isolated, though it is true that the conflict between these policies bulks large in nearly every debate in the United Nations. But in spite of the impression we may have derived from reading the newspapers, the tensions between the Communist countries and their ideological rivals is not the only tension in the world organisation. There are others of great significance. This is as it should be, because the United Nations ought to reflect the tensions in the world. Its mission is, if possible, to resolve them.

—G. P. BARTON,
October 16, 1954.

