



NEWTON BOWLES--SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR

OR UNICEF AND MUCH MORE.

With the CBC's Shelagh Rogers - March 14, 2002.

SR: Founders of the United Nations could not have imagined the world as it unfolded. The struggle against apartheid, civil wars in Rwanda and Yugoslavia. Epidemics such as AIDS and most recently the war on terrorism. Newton Bowles has had a front-row seat as these issues developed. He's worked at the UN since its inception. He is 85 years old now and he's the author of a new book called *The Diplomacy of Hope, The United Nations since the Cold War*.

He was appointed to the Order of Canada this year and recently I spoke with Newton Bowles. . .

SR: Good morning and congratulations on your OC.

NB: Thank you. I'm supposed to say I don't deserve it. That's the usual line isn't it? . . . But of course I'm tickled, it's a great surprise to me. . . . But I take this not so much personally as a tribute to UNICEF where I spent most of my life. It also says something very good about Canada--that Canada recognizes the value of international service as very important for Canada. It is something that you certainly would not find, I regret, south of the border.

SR: You do spend your summers here, north of the border?

NB: I have since I stopped working full time at the UN. I have re-established my Canadian connections. You know, I'm not only continuing on a dollar-a-year basis with UNICEF where I'm sort of a senior policy advisor but I'm also representing a couple of Canadian organizations at the UN--the Canadian United Nations association and the Group of 78, which is a sort of respectable UN lobby in Ottawa.

SR: Before you went to college, didn't you spend some years in China?

NB: My parents were Chinese missionaries of the enlightened kind and I was born, spent my childhood, in Sutron. Sutron is four rivers, it's at the headwaters of the Yangtze right next to Tibet. This was an extremely violent disturbed time.

We were living in the capital city of Chungking and from my childhood I saw the most terrible evidence of brutality. On my way to school, for example. We lived inside the city

and this Canadian school was on the university campus. It was about five miles out. I went on horseback but on my way I could see decapitated bodies and soldiers all over the place. I remember being astonished when we returned to Toronto (and) I said where are the soldiers. No evidence of military on the streets.

SR: How old were you when you came back?

NB: I was 10. . . Of course, I've been back since with the UN. . . . this was the beginning of my UN experience. I was there with the UN post-war relief organization and that, I must say, was my political education. I was just a nice Sunday school boy but was thrust into the middle of this absolutely civil war of the dimensions of War and Peace and I was made responsible for getting humanitarian relief across the battle lines. And that was really something. It was astonishing that none of us was killed. Subsequently, with UNICEF, that was then, oh, 30 years later, I was invited by the Chinese government to open discussions about UNICEF working in China.

The fact that I had helped get humanitarian relief across the lines during the civil war opened the doors for me and for UNICEF there. It's a kind of symmetry for me having been born in China.

SR: Absolutely.

NB: And really quite a remarkable bit of luck for me.

SR: As we said, you have been with the UN since its inception as the United Nations and I think especially recently there have been arguments that have suggested that the UN isn't the effective body that it used to be and I think many Canadians will cite the glory days of Lester Pearson but that was the time when Canada was seen as having a very powerful and central role.

How do you think the UN shapes up now?

NB: Well, that's a difficult question. First, I think there is a certain nostalgia about how the UN was. The UN was a kind of miracle. The fact that it exists at all is quite astonishing, isn't it?

In this complex situation, we have, on the one hand at the UN, ideals and hopes and that's what my book is about and these far exceed our capacity to put them into effect now. But in this whole UN process, we have seen the development of a whole battery of human rights treaties and the beginnings of the capacity to enforce these. There is no international police force. There's no international army. We don't have jails into which we stick people.

But we have the beginnings. For example, (we have them) in these war crimes tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda. This is astonishing.

This is something that's never existed before. These war crimes tribunals are paving the way for the international permanent criminal court. And I must say that Canada played a real, a leading, role in making this criminal court a possibility. Our Ambassador Philip Pierce presided over the diplomatic conference in Rome in 1998. He did a most skilful job in pulling all that together.

So Canada has continued to play a key role in many ways. That's just one example.

SR: In other words, to those that say that the UN is irrelevant these days, I think you'd just say a big phooey.

NB: Well, I think that Sept. 11 has told us that the UN is essential. We just can't get along by ourselves. One hopes that this will have a profound impact on our friends the superpower which you know has tended to go it alone, especially since the recent election.

SR: I wonder what it is, and I don't ant to fill in any blanks for you, that has kept you at the UN for more than 50 years?

NB: Shelagh, I think it's a great privilege to be able to devote your life and energies to trying to translate the ideal into reality. Working with UNICEF has, of course, been a special privilege because there we were able to surmount political differences. Children somehow manage to defuse every political argument. During these terrible confrontations, UNICEF was able to work on both sides. For example, during even now in Afghanistan, during these terrible convulsions, we were able to initiate immunization work in El Salvador while they were at each other's throats. They actually stopped fighting to make it possible for us to help children.

Children are not just band-aids, they are our future. This is not just charity. This is a serious investment in life, in the future of humanity on the planet. And to be able to work at the UN, with all its frustrations, is a great privilege.

SR: Newton, in your book you say speaking of investment that investment in hope is a risky business.

NB: Yes, well, isn't it a risky business in our private lives and of course if you present that on the international screen, it's even more so. I am astonished that you can take a team which right now is made up of citizens working at the UN from 160 countries and put that together as a working team. Isn't that amazing?

We're coming to realize that a world order based on fear and distress is inherently insecure, unstable, and that we must move to an recognition of the fact that we all are brothers and sisters.

At UNICEF, my current preoccupation, something I'm beginning to work on, is the process of healing. That is recovery from war. UNICEF and many others of course have been involved in this, trying to help children, young people, communities, deal with the terrible trauma of war. This dreadful experience they have been through.

And that is at the personal and community level. Of course, at the national level, at the social level, we have a similar thing that is being attempted which is through truth and reconciliation commissions. The social feeling.

We know most about what has been attempted in South Africa, but in fact there have been more than 20 of these. Right now, this is being instituted in Sierra Leone where we have a classic example of working at the local personal level and also at the national level along with a national and UN war crimes tribunal.
This is the way of the future.

SR: It's a real pleasure to meet you and see you face to face. Thanks very much for your time.