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If it is a truism, as Oscar Wilde said, that "a man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies," then the Heritage Foundation of Washington, D.C., has achieved new status in the world. It has acquired an enemy who spews venom at Heritage out of one side of his mouth while, at the same time, he convicts himself with admissions against interest that he is "a democratic socialist, embracing the kind of heretical past which probably had his name in the filing cabinets entitled 'subversive.'"

The Heritage Foundation is a low-key, scholarly think tank, grinding out reports and papers noteworthy for their lack of passion and tedious objectivity. It's hard to see how the stacks of paper arising from that staid and respectable building at 214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., could rouse anyone to such anger.

The author of this outburst of incivility was Ambassador Stephen Lewis, Canada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. The occasion was this year's annual convention of the United Nations Association of the United States.

It must be something about the sort of uncivilized beings who inhabit the UN, or the short working hours and long liquor hours, that causes such boorishness. The UN is an unreal world where personnel are overpaid, underworked, annointed with special tax-avoiding privileges, and ultimately are led to mistake rhetoric for reality.

We've been used to the invective shouted against the United States by Communist and Third World representatives at the United Nations for years. It was surprising to find such vitriol coming from our sister country of the north.

Lewis castigated Heritage and "others of their ilk" as "neo-isolationists" and as "fundamentally anti-internationalist." What is the proof of his accusation? Horror of horrors, Lewis said, "They do not believe that the national interests of the United States should ever be subsumed in the interests of the greater international community."

Bully for Heritage! Heritage's able president, Dr. Edwin J. Fuelner, Jr., should enshrine that accolade in his fundraising letters. It should be worth a few million dollars in contributions from Americans who will rally to his support.

Ambassador Lewis admitted that Heritage is a group "which wields influence and therefore has to be responded to." But Lewis didn't respond to Heritage or refute a single report it ever published; he only indulged in unsupported generalities.

What really got Lewis so agitated was that the Heritage Foundation has put out some scholarly papers telling some of the truths about the UN's waste, espionage, support of terrorists, and anti-Americanism which have been so discreetly disguised by the establishment media for the last 40 years.

Ambassador Lewis called himself "a shameless apologist" for the UN and complained that "it isn't the institution of the United Nations, the body corporate, which is the problem; it is the behavior of individual nation-states which is the problem." Not so, Mr. Lewis. It is the institution itself that is inherently unworkable and shameful.

It was born in a lie (that the organizing nations were "peace-loving"), a betrayal (we held Poland's seat empty until the Soviet puppet regime could replace the anti-Communist government), a fraud (three votes to the U.S.S.R. while other nations got only one), and a secret agreement (that the Soviets would always be able to appoint the number-two official in the Secretariat).

When the UN was organized in San Francisco in 1945 with Alger Hiss as Secretary General, it had 51 members. Today there are 159, many of them tiny, each with one vote. They amuse themselves by conspiring in voting blocs to humiliate the West.

UN speeches echo and reecho the same depressing themes. "The West is bad and ought to turn over the fruits of its labor and investment to the Third World. SWAPO is good; South Africa is bad. PLO is good; Israel is bad. Give us more money so we can kick you around for not giving us twice as much."

The establishment media concealed the fakery of the UN from the American people for nearly 40 years. They sanctified the UN into a sort of secular religion; it became a blasphemy for anyone to question the dogma that the UN was "our last best hope for peace."

The Heritage Foundation is to be commended for reporting facts which have dispelled costly illusions about the UN. Ambassador Lewis is whistling in the wind. He boasts that Canada is "utterly non-nuclear." As a non-nuclear nation in a nuclear age, Canada had better look to the United States for its defense, not the United Nations.