

Correspondence

U.N. Special Assembly

To the Editors: Sensible writing about the United Nations is rare these days. Indeed, in American public policy discussions of recent years any writing about the U.N. is rare. Perhaps under President Ford the U.N. will once again become a primary referent in U.S. foreign policy considerations, as it so clearly was not during the Nixon (-Kissinger?) years. In any case, one welcomes the kind of sympathetic attention given the U.N. by Jennifer Seymour Whitaker ("Power and Politics at the U.N.," August). Obviously your author was trying hard to listen to what the Third World nations were trying to say in the special assembly dealing with the growing gap between rich and poor.

At the same time, however, it is regrettable that Ms. Whitaker demonstrates a suspiciousness toward Third World motivations that is absent from her comments on the rich nations. She writes, for example, that "it is fair inference that President Hourari Boumediene [of Algeria] asked for the special session in order to take the heat off the oil producers." This is in fact a very serious charge. Ms. Whitaker offers no evidence that there was some kind of backstairs deal between Algeria (or, for that matter, any other Third World nation) and the oil producing nations organized in OPEC. Does it not seem more reasonable that the poor have valid reasons enough to protest their getting the short end of the stick in terms of global resource distribution? Admittedly, the timing of the session was no doubt related to the "crisis consciousness" created by energy and other shortages. The leaders of the "LDCs," as they are called, are not fools. OPEC has flexed its muscles and successfully intimidated many of the overdeveloped nations. Now was the time to remind the rich

nations of the facts of global interdependence. But surely the purpose was to put the heat on the rich nations more than it was to "take the heat off the oil producers"—or anyone else for that matter.

Because in a Kissinger world it is assumed that everyone is playing power games, we are too much inclined to look behind appearances in order to discover the "true" reasons for what people do or say. While not devoid of strategic or diplomatic abilities, the poor nations are not playing a game. The appearance of their desperate plight is indeed the truth of their situation. The purpose of the special assembly was to direct international attention to that appearance and that truth. That purpose can only be frustrated if we persist in speculating about "real" motivations. The starvation of tens of thousands of people, a per capita annual income of \$150, and the growing gap between rich and poor—these realities are motivation enough for the recent special assembly and much more. It is unfortunate that in an otherwise fair and informative article Ms. Whitaker succumbed even in small part to the cynicism that tempts us all.

Charles E. Cotrain

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"In Praise of the Automobile"

To the Editors: Peter Berger's "In Praise of the Automobile" ("Excursus," August) is undoubtedly a curious piece. One is puzzled by whether it is to be taken straight or is intended as satire of a particular style of social criticism. First he tells us what marvelous blessings the automobile has brought to the modern world (after last week's repair bill I am tempted to ask what model he owns that gives him such great pleasure), and then goes on to mention some of the drawbacks. The conclusion is that there is a trade-off between the blessings and the curses of automobiles and we must make a decision about whether it is worthwhile maintaining our automobile culture and about whatever alternatives there may be to it. . . .

Since the negative side of an automobile culture has received lavish attention in recent years, one supposes Professor Berger simply wanted to right the balance somewhat. But in what way is that a contribution to the discussion? He gives no indication that he disagrees with the negative assessment and the need to find an alternative to the automobile. Perhaps the article is to be seen as an affectionate farewell, a kind of regretful leave-taking, of the machine he and we can no longer afford. Yet the thought lingers that Berger really is not willing to give up his car. He speaks of "an affection [for the automobile] that was by no means degrading." But the thrust of the article implies that the use of the past tense is premature. . . . Be that as it may, I hope it is not ungracious to inquire about whether *Worldview* picked up many new subscriptions among the carmakers of Detroit. That at least would be some consolation in my search for a reason for publishing "In Praise of the Automobile."

Joseph Shroeder

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Polytheism

To the Editors: Three cheers for the priceless review of David Miller's *The New Polytheism* (Briefly Noted, August). It is a good sign to see that not everyone is taken in by the know-nothingism and anti-intellectualism of the new religious "thought." The moral drawn about being wary of those American Academy of Religion meetings is pretty good too.

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Correction

Printer's gremlins were at work in the August issue of *Worldview*, eluding antigremlin forces. In Ashok Kapur's "Excursus" on India's Nuclear Test, the demonized phrase should have read: "and then Canada tried in vain to impose its NPT view on pre-NPT Indo-Canadian atomic agreements."