

UN Headquarters

## The Secretary General

LAST month, at one of the last pre-Assembly press conferences held by Mr Dag Hammarskjold (he does not hold conferences when the Assembly is in session), a Yugoslav correspondent asked him a question which was on the minds of several of his colleagues. "Sir", he said, "Do your personal plans for the future exclude the possibility of giving us the pleasure of meeting you at press conferences in the next few years?" It was, as everyone present knew, a loaded question. The Secretary General's term ends in April 1958 and it has to be renewed—as there is every indication that it will be—by the Security Council. The questioner obviously wanted to know whether the Secretary General himself felt he would continue in his office for another term. But Mr Hammarskjold refused to rise to the bait. With typical urbanity and a completely straight face he replied: "I do not think that your ambition should be aimed so high; I think it will be quite enough and a pleasure to be able to meet you all during this winter". And when another questioner persisted, he snapped: "I really would not like to pursue this discussion at all. You know just as well as I do that there is not a man in the world who is not expendable".

### International Civil Servant

So far, no other alternative candidate has been suggested by the big four and the chances are that Mr Hammarskjold will again be elected for a further term. It is quite possible, of course, that no man is so precious that he is not expendable. But the general consensus of opinion among diplomats here is that the tall and now perceptibly aging Swede has done as good a job in being the world's number one international civil servant as could be expected of anybody—even a neutral Swede. Mr Hammarskjold's personal virtues have often been written about. But he would seem to be the antithesis of Mr Trygve Lie, his ebullient, extrovert predecessor. He is a bachelor, whose hobbies are hiking and reading. At his press conferences he is fond of occasionally quoting a well-known writer; Indians sometimes compare him with Chintaman

Deshmukh; Hammarskjold, like Shri Deshmukh is scholarly, but not pedantic, shy, but not a snob, conscious of his role as a civil servant and zealous in keeping strictly "neutral". A man with a lesser understanding of his role might well have fallen into the easy trap of being a partisan in the fiery controversies that engulfed the United Nations over the Suez and Hungarian issues. But not Mr Hammarskjold. To the last, he maintained an even keel, refusing to pander to the whims of either power group and thus acting as the flag-bearer of true international civil service.

How strictly he adheres to his code of civil service practice can be gauged from a typical press conference question-and-answer session. Here is a random sample:

Question: Do you feel that both sides will be adequately presented in the coming session on Hungary?

Mr Hammarskjold: I hope so.

Question: Are you satisfied with the manner in which Egypt is handling the Suez Canal—the operation and everything?

Mr Hammarskjold: What interest is attached to my satisfaction or lack of satisfaction? I think the record is a public one and everybody has the right to have his own views on how it has worked out.

Question: In view of the vast quantities of arms which the Soviet Union is supplying to various countries in the Middle East, Senator Humphrey suggested the other day that at its next session the United Nations General Assembly should discuss an agreement to limit the supply of arms to that area. What do you think of such a plan? Do you think that would be feasible?

Mr Hammarskjold: I should not like to go into the last part of that question; it brings us a little into territory that is too adventurous. I think that the problem which has been raised is primarily a problem for those few countries which are in a position to supply arms. If those countries can agree on a policy on the lines you indicate, that is one thing. It is a different thing for the United Nations, with all the countries represented in it, to sit down and make statements about

what should be done. I think that this is first of all a case for diplomacy of the classical type, and only in the second instance a question for the United Nations as such."

### Not in Favour of Weighted Voting

Consider his approach. Mr Hammarskjold is not one to rush in where angels fear to tread. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that he does not hold opinions of his own. Indeed, he has decided opinions on matters where he resolutely refuses to make any comment. Those who watched him during the eventful days that followed the Anglo-French attack on Suez and the Soviet interference in Hungary hardly had any doubts on his views. To many he seemed particularly upset over the British and French invasion of Egyptian territory. As the secretary general he cannot openly come out in favour of any oppressed country particularly where controversial issues are involved. But where he could express opinions freely and this is possible when he submits his annual report to the General Assembly he does so, with just that urbane restraint characteristic of the man. His comments on the question of weighted voting in his current report to the General Assembly is an eloquent example of his general approach to smaller nations. It must be understood that for some time now there has been some discreet mumbling among some of the Western powers that the smaller Asian African nations, because of their sheer number (they total 28 among eighty two) can act as a vetoing bloc in the General Assembly. One way to clip their power, it has been suggested, is to rearrange the pattern of one country one vote to something that would give powerful nations additional weightage.

This, Mr Hammarskjold said in his report, is about as foolish as it could be. "I believe," he said with all the emphasis at his command, "that the criticism of the system of one vote for one nation, irrespective of size or strength, as constituting an obstacle to arriving at just and representative solutions, tends to exaggerate the problem. The General Assembly is not a parliament

of elected individual members; it is a diplomatic meeting in which the delegates of member states represent Governmental policies and these policies are subject to all the influences that would prevail in international life in any case". And then he delivered a broadside against those who have been criticising the smaller Asian African nations for banding together to protect their interests. He said: "Smaller nations are not in the habit of banding together against the larger nations whose power to affect international security and well-being is so much greater than their own. Nor do I see justification for talk about the responsible and the irresponsible among the nations. The two thirds rule applied to all major decisions in the General Assembly should serve as a reasonable assurance to those who may not fully share the views that have been here expressed".

#### U N O—Imperfect but Indispensable

There have been few better judgments on the cohesion of the smaller nations than this one. Mr Hammarskjold must necessarily be careful in his comments. At the same time he also has to serve as an alarm clock, as a giver of timely warnings to all concerned on the state of the world. This is by no means an enviable task. To turn a blind eye to the goings on in the world on the pretext that a secretary general has merely to obey the dictates of the United Nations would be as much shirking of a major responsibility as seeking to direct the course of history from his perch on the thirty eighth floor of the U N building would be deviating from one's role as the first civil servant. Mr Hammarskjold does not pretend to be anything else but a civil servant who finds it his painful duty to inform the world of its destinies, and let the chips fall where they may. Is there a national awakening in Africa on the model of Asia? Yes, says Mr Hammarskjold, there is. "With its increase in membership", he said, writing the preface to his report on the world organisation's working last year, "the United Nations more fully mirrors the realities of the present world situation than ever before, although necessarily the picture given in the debates and votes in the United Nations can be truly evaluated only after a careful analysis. The United Nations reflects, not in any sense a cause of,

the renaissance of Asia. The awakening of Africa, and the other great changes that are under way in the balance of power and relationships of the peoples are likewise part of the dynamics of history itself. As always, they bring with them many grave problems of adjustment. These all too easily may become the occasion for arousing passion, fear and hatred and lead in turn to violent upheavals and to the ultimate disaster of war in this atomic age".

One notices here Mr Hammarskjold's philosophical approach to history; man, he seems to say, everywhere in the world, but more especially in the hitherto "backward" areas, is struggling towards the light, and needs assistance. In his fight for liberty and freedom, man struggles against fellow man, all these relationships between man and man being "part of the dynamics of history itself". Mr Hammarskjold tends to look at the world as a unit, the struggles of smaller nations and weaker peoples as but part of the larger, painful process of integration of all mankind. The United Nations cannot often do much to alleviate the suffering, because it is no world authority enforcing the law upon nations. But would it be fair to turn aside from it for that same reason? Mr Hammarskjold's answer is an emphatic no. "We should rather", says the Secretary General in his report, "recognise the United Nations for what it is an admittedly imperfect but indispensable instrument of nations in working for a peaceful evolution towards a more just and secure world order".

#### Classicist in Diplomacy

If one were to define the qualifications of a secretary general, they would include among other virtues, patience of a high order. The man who fills the post will have to be not only a man of distinction, but a scholar, a philosopher and an incurable optimist who sees in every rolling black cloud a streak of the most dazzling silver lining. The temptation is to say that he should be all things to all people, but that would not be true, for he should be able to present to all people the same vision of one world. This is by no means an easy task. With eighty two countries pulling in an equal number of directions, the task of reconciling conflicting interests calls for understanding of a high order, Mr Hammarskjold, in that

sense, is a classicist in the field of diplomacy. He makes silence speak more eloquently than words.

Right now nobody else seems to be in the running for the post of the secretary general. The Soviet Union seems satisfied with Mr Hammarskjold's performance and despite the persistence of the cold war, it is unlikely that Mr Hammarskjold will be sacrificed at its altar, as was Mr Lie. Looking back in retrospect, Mr Lie, it would seem, took on the burdens of the world on himself, seeking to draw the lines between right and wrong as his personal responsibility. Mr Hammarskjold has no such grandiloquent ideas. He would not offer to go to Moscow during the Hungarian crisis though Mr Trygve Lie might have, and indeed did, in similar circumstances. In a large measure, Mr Hammarskjold has drawn rules of conduct for himself and for those who will, inevitably, have to follow him in the future. Mr Hammarskjold, it would seem, has learnt from the mistakes of his predecessor.

#### How Many Terms?

It may be that at least for some time to come, the Security Council will do well to ask Mr Hammarskjold to continue in his post. No doubt there are other men who could fill the post with equal dignity and efficiency. No man is indispensable, said Mr Hammarskjold and he certainly has no illusions on the score. Besides, it seems but apt that one who has learnt the nuances of the game is given another term to usefully employ his experience. What should be the tenure of a secretary general? To put it in other words, for how many terms should a person be appointed secretary general? The presidentship of the United States is limited to two terms. Such an arrangement has its appeal. But the United Nations is still a young organisation and rules governing the number of terms a secretary general can serve can undoubtedly be made in the future as the Organisation grows.

The question of how long a person can serve as a secretary general, of course, can be endlessly debated. A great deal will no doubt depend upon the individual himself, his ability to be "neutral"—in the best sense of the word—in the conflict between the major powers, his ability to help in the resolution of these conflicts without seeming to be bending too much on any one

