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UN INTERNVIEW
Brian Urquhart
May 30, 1984
Interviewer: Leon Gordenker

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The Office of the Secretary-General

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UNITED NATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

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OF INTERVIEWS WITH

BRIAN URQUHART

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GORDENKER: This is an interview with Brian Urquhart, Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, on May 30 1984. I am Leon Gordenker.

Brian, our interview today will centre around the office of Secretary-General, a subject which you thought would be a good one to start with. We're going to talk about the institutional development of the office and lead on to certain political functions and to talk about some of the incumbents in the office. As we develop this, I hope that you will feel free to wander where you think you ought to go and to express opinions and to point us in the direction of possible further questions in further interviews.

Let me begin with a very broad question which touches on the institutional development of the office. Do you associate - to what extent do you associate - particular policies and particular approaches with the periods of the office of the Secretary-General laid out by the terms of the incumbents? Is there some approach which distinguishes each one of these periods? What sort of choices were made about this, either consciously or unconsciously, that led to developments in the office?

URQUHART: I think that they all - the five that I have known - all had basically the same approach and the same desire to try to make the office work as well as it could. I think the difference is partly in personality and natural ability, and partly in the circumstances of the time they were operating in. ~~I mean~~ to give you an example of that, there is no question that Trygve Lie was extremely unfortunate in the time he was operating in, and Hammarskjold, literally by a factor of about a month, was extremely fortunate in coming in on the world scene at a point of considerable optimism - Stalin had died, Eisenhower had taken over, there was a cease-fire in Korea, and so

on - and there was an effort at détente. I mean, he was very lucky. But of course, it wouldn't have been any good for him just to be lucky: he also did have remarkable qualities of leadership and analysis and action and so on. So I think it's a mixture of both.

GORDENKER: Supposing we push a little bit farther on this. The office of the Secretary-General is described as a principal organ of the United Nations, and your comment - you really suggested that the larger political environment outside was one of the determining factors, and a second determining factor in the development of the office was the personal capacities and ability at leadership.

Let's put that personal capacity aside for a minute and talk about the way in which the outside environment plays - and the way this notion of a principal organ plays. It is a fair conclusion - or to what degree is it a fair conclusion - that this notion of a principal organ in the United Nations leads one away from the point in discussing the development of the office, that the real forces are outside in the larger political realm?

URQUHART: Yes, I think that's true. I think the word "principal organ" is also, though in the Charter, a somewhat misleading phrase to use in relation to what is the nearest thing to a leader the world community has. I mean, after all, the Secretary-General is the only elected international official in the political field. He is supposed to represent the world community in the sense of responsibility for international peace and security, administration and so on, and he is an individual.

In fact, one of the great weaknesses of the Secretary-Generalship is that most of his main functions cannot be deputized; they cannot be farmed out to somebody else, which makes the job virtually impossible to do, because you

have in fact three main jobs in the Secretary-Generalship: you have the chief bureaucrat, the chief administrative officer; you have the political functions of the Secretary-General, which have increased - as we'll discuss later - very radically over the years; and then you have the whole representational function of the guy who is asked to make speeches, to make official visits, to attend great international conferences. The representational function lets him in for an enormous amount of time and travel, and the other two functions are almost full time as well, and so - He is an individual, and I think it's important to hang onto that idea. In my view - well, we'll talk about that later too - it's organizationally one of the great weaknesses of the office, that you cannot deputize its main function.

GORDENKER: This is another way of saying, it seems to me, that the office of the Secretary-General does not really have some inherent ability, whatever the legal provisions are, to stand against the Security Council or the General Assembly or even, for that matter, some of the very influential Goverments. Would I be correct in concluding that?

URQUHART: Yes, but of course there's another side to that coin too. ~~It is -- I mean,~~ When we started off, there was a great suspicion of any political move whatsoever by the Secretary-General, and that was one of the things that Trygve Lie had to overcome. Everybody in those days remembered vividly Sir Eric Drummond (the first Secretary-General of the League of Nations) and his immense discretion - the fact that he never spoke in public, he only operated behind the scenes, and so on - and this was the model which was then being looked for. Then we had the cold war and with it the paralysis of the Security Council, and everybody was looking around for someone to pass the buck to, and of course the Secretary-General was the obvious person.

And it is in the abyss of the cold war that the Secretary-Generalship began to flourish as a political institution, ~~because he was someone who you could - I mean,~~ supposing the Soviet Union got into Hungary and nobody could get them out: then, the best thing to do was to ask the Secretary-General to do it. Supposing the British and the French invaded Egypt with the Israelis: the best thing to do was to ask the Secretary-General to fix it. And nowadays, we've got the Soviet in Afghanistan and nobody can get them out, so guess who is trying to negotiate it?

~~I mean~~, I think that one has to see that there are certain situations which Governments can't cope with, are too politically divided and too weak to cope with, but they need to be able to say to their own constituencies, "We have done something about this." And if you read, for example, Hansard, the record of the British House of Commons, it's absolutely extraordinary, the number of questions on foreign policy to which the Prime Minister of the day invariably replies, "We are in touch with the United Nations on this, and the Secretary-General, Mr. X, has our full support in his efforts." ~~I mean,~~ Cyprus is a classic case in point: it's been going on for 20 years now. Nobody can touch it, so we deal with it."

~~I mean, I think~~ this is the opposite of the restriction on the Secretary-Generalship which Governments impose when they're really in full control of the situation. For example, the United States doesn't want the Secretary-General messing around in Central America at the minute, because it's the preeminent Power in Central America. And that goes for a lot of other countries in other places too.

GORDENKER: Let's go back to the first term, then, Trygve Lie's term. Was he successful? Was he conscious as well as successful in providing

this new role, different from the Drummond role, for the Secretary-General? Was he conscious of this, and was he successful at it?

URQUHART: I think he was certainly conscious of it. I think that Trygve Lie was handed a very raw deal by history, ~~really~~, because ~~I mean~~, what everybody now forgets is that the League of Nations had three years to set itself up. We were off and running before we even had an office building. We had cases in the Security Council, we had the Assembly meeting, we had a whole series of urgent things - the Palestine question, the Kashmir question, the Greek civil war, the Azerbaijan question, the Corfu Channel case - all going great guns when we hadn't even got the office supplies in.

And he [Lie] really had to do two things: he had to try to be a politically serious Secretary-General and, at the same time, he had to get the Secretariat together, find a home, build it, do all the administration which you have to do in a new organization, ~~and~~ I've come to the conclusion that Trygve comes out actually a hell of a lot better than people said at the time. And he did try to take political initiatives. They were not always wise, but then, who is wise in crises? They were not always very well considered, but then, we didn't have very much experience in those days.

Trygve proposed, for example, the United Nations Legion, something that ~~our~~ friends and admirers who don't understand the political process are always proposing now. He proposed the first international peace-keeping force, in fact. It didn't come off because the political objections to it were huge, but he tried it. He was quite active in the political field; he made ~~proposed~~, I think, too many general proposals - like the 20-year peace plan, for example, which anybody nowadays would know not to do. But in those days we were all very idealistic, and people really thought that the war had taught people such

a lesson that they had learned it and that they were prepared to do something different from what they'd done in the past. It now turns out that wasn't true, but in those days we thought it was, and I think Trygve, within his rather considerable intellectual and political limitations, did his best to be an active political Secretary-General. And of course in the end it finished him, ~~because~~.

GORDENKER: And then his successor, Dag Hammarskjöld, came in in a fortunate situation, you say. What are the contrasts between Hammarskjöld's and Lie's tenure? Was it Hammarskjöld who was very conscious about setting out doctrine - or so it seemed to me and I've had the feeling, looking back at it, that he was really very conscious about trying to codify the practices of his office as a means of institutionalizing them. Is there a contrast here between Lie and Hammarskjold in regard to this institutional build-up, and does that contrast also extend - if there is one - to the aims that they had?

URQUHART: Well, I think their aims were the same, but there's a very great contrast in background, personality and general formation. Lie, after all, was a trade union lawyer by origin. Hammarskjold was an intellectual from a family which had a long tradition of public service in Sweden. He was, in my view, an extraordinarily brilliant man. He had a capacity for intellectual analysis, as you rightly say, for the evolution of principles of a practical kind which would govern his action - which made life, ~~if you could do it,~~ much easier for him, because he always had guidelines to go by which he himself had drawn up. ~~I think that~~ He was a person of quite exceptional gifts. It wasn't quite what the Governments had bargained for when they elected him, which was one of the better jokes of the United Nations, ~~and I think it did serve magnificently.~~

But of course Hammarskjold ran eventually into exactly the same obstacles that Lie ran into. He ran into the fact that you can't be active without really becoming partisan - or being seen to be partisan, at any rate. He ran, in exactly the same way as Lie had, into the East-West struggle, especially the Soviet-American struggle, and again, that was what really finished him off - I don't mean physically, but in terms of effectiveness.

So that they really did have very similar problems. The difference was that Hammarskjold was ~~a very~~ an extremely organized, highly intellectual person, who was capable of combining that with a great deal of action, which I think was his remarkable gift, one not usually found. ~~I think that what is a little bit unfair is that~~ the really dazzling performance which he put on, and his ~~extreme~~ mixture of articulateness and obscurity, which he used deliberately, did create a great impression on everybody. He was a very striking figure. And, of course, he started off really on a much better basis than Lie did.

GORDENKER: Now, Hammarskjold's successor was U Thant. Did Thant approach the office with a different set of goals? You've said earlier in a very general way that they all pretty much had the same notion, but was there really a different here, and what kind of difference was there?

Let me suggest to you that Thant was the first Secretary-General from the third world and was rather unexpected, perhaps, as a candidate, but there he was, eventually, as Secretary-General for two terms. What about his approach to the institution, and what contrasts or differences or comparisons would you make?

URQUHART: Well, again, I think the difference is not so much in goals as in background and personality. U Thant was a religious - a

practicing Buddhist; he had grown up in the sort of evolutionary tradition of the third world in transition as the chief assistant to U Nu. He had grown up in the Burmese independence movement, ~~and I think~~ I happen to think that U Thant, ~~is the person~~ of all the five Secretaries-General who I've served, is the one - so far, at any rate - who's got the meanest treatment from history.

~~When one thinks that~~ U Thant's memoirs were never even reviewed in the United States, though they were published here, and they are, in a rather simplistic way, an extremely interesting book, ~~because~~ there's a great deal of information in there which is not available anywhere else, but nobody's even bothered to find it. I think that says something about the ghastly, smart-ass prejudices of our Western society. I think that U Thant was grossly underestimated.

He did something, for example, which ~~certainly~~ I don't think any of his fellow Secretaries-General would have done. He tackled, with no authority, the Viet Nam War. And now, for the first time, ~~it's~~ it's begun to be published, what he did - though it's all been available all along. ~~It's in~~ In Barbara Tuchman's book called The Pursuit of Folly, ~~that~~ for the first time I see in a popular American book, there is an account of what U Thant tried to do. And what he did, in fact, got very very far in terms of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Minh. He actually got them to agree to the procedure - exactly the procedure - for which five years later Kissinger got the Nobel Peace Prize, only U Thant thought of it five years and 58,000 American casualties before.

He never got any credit for that at all; he was publicly despised ~~completely shopped~~ by the Johnson Administration, and especially Secretary of State Dean Rusk, for reasons which are still slightly obscure - according to some, because they wanted to save the South Vietnamese Government, according to others, because they didn't want any foreigner

meddling in this holy war. I don't know what's the truth, but whatever it was, it was a scandal. ~~And he has never never got any credit for that.~~ ~~And~~ that was a very courageous thing to do, and he did it for no good reason, apart from the fact that he had a very strong moral sense, perhaps the strongest moral sense of any Secretary-General.

Of course, what did U Thant's reputation in was the 1967 decision over the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF); ~~of course~~, we'll want to talk about that at great length. I have a lot of very strong views about that. I don't know any episode in my experience of public life in which almost everybody behaved so badly. It really was outrageous, and of course the scapegoat was U Thant, who was the one person who tried to do something about it. ~~So~~, It is a monstrous case of historical injustice, and I would like to have that on the record in detail.

GORDENKER: We'll do that in a later session.

URQUHART: But I think that U Thant, to the Western media particularly, appeared to be this somewhat sleepy Oriental. Far from it. ~~I think~~ U Thant internalized his conflicts and his turmoils. The fact that he had ulcers for the entire period of his Secretary-Generalship and was often practically incapacitated by them is just one symptom of that. He was a person who kept a very calm public appearance; he was an extremely dignified man; he was a very good man, a very courageous person. I don't know anybody else who would have said in the Soviet Union that he thought it was a great pity that the Russian leadership had misinformed the Russian people about the Congo. It was not a bad remark, and he got it on Moscow Radio, too; it's quite good.

He was very direct, but he wasn't someone that the Western media could ever quite comprehend, and I think that was a pity. I think of all the five, he was the worse served and, perhaps, the most unjustly judged by the media.

GORDENKER: Let's pursue this just a little bit farther. You seem to me to be saying that Thant's approach to the office was a somewhat more individualistic one than that of his two predecessors, who had tried very hard to act in a political way in the sense of organizing consensus, organizing support. It was certainly true of Hammarskjold's doctrinal expeditions, and it would seem to have been true of the numerous reports that Trygve Lie made to the Security Council and to the General Assembly when he proposed his various innovative programmes. Now here is Thant, who you present as taking this on in a very personal way, as if it were his personal responsibility, with somewhat less thought about the institutional development. To what degree is that a fair conclusion?

URQUHART: Well, I think it perhaps is - it's part of the conclusion. I think that of all the five, U Thant was the most highly moral, if not moralistic. He was a very religious man in an extremely private way; he was, I think, genuinely and deeply appalled at what he regarded as a lack of humanity, and also an erosion of - in a way - spiritual balance. He minded very much about this.

He was, for example, convinced ~~in a very mild way~~, not at all in a fanatical way, that, in fact, phenomena like the Viet Nam War were ~~really~~ to some extent the result of a kind of unconscious racism, and that shocked him terribly. ~~And, I must confess, that I reached the same conclusion myself~~. I don't think anybody meant it to be a racist war, but it in fact was. You've only got to look at the way the casualties on both sides are still treated in

the Western media to see that nobody gave a damn about the number of Vietnamese killed - they couldn't have cared less. Now we have the case of Agent Orange, where there's a most frightful uproar going on because of what happened to American servicemen. Well, what the hell happened to the people who were living there? Nobody's ever bothered to ask. I think that he was very shocked by that kind of phenomenon and very much wanted, not to blame people, but to try to set it right.

So, in one way, he was a much more interesting occupant of the post. And I think one also must remember that ~~in the period when he took over~~, in the first place, he took over an Organization in full collapse. It wasn't just the death of Hammarskjold, it was the constitutional crisis over the Congo operation, which damn nearly wrecked this Organization; it nearly split it in half completely, and it also, incidentally, stopped the General Assembly ~~it stone dead for a whole~~ period over the Article 19 business. U Thant set about trying to plaster over that and get the UN ~~it~~ back together again, and I think you could argue that he did rather a good job of it. His method of doing it wasn't in any Western sense a "professional approach".. I don't think U Thant understood much about bureaucracy. I don't think he really understood too much about political structures, but he preferred to operate at another level. You could say that that wasn't so good. I personally think you could argue that it was rather sound.. He was ~~an extremely — he was~~ personally a very remarkable man. Hammarskjold was overtly much more remarkable because he was far more articulate, far more what Western people are used to and far more explicit - as you said at the beginning - at articulating principles and ideas and procedures and ways of operating, peace-keeping, the United Nations presence, good offices, all this kind of thing. U Thant didn't do any of

that. He inherited what he got and kept going at a rather different level.

Who is to say which is more effective? I think that you could say that both were different shots at the same goal.

GORDENKER: Do you think that U Thant operated in really quite a different political environment from that of his predecessor? By "political environment," I mean the environment of broader world politics. Had the cold war changed? Had the world become more complex, less complex?

URQUHART: Well, it was very rapidly becoming more complex. This was the period of the vast increase in the membership, the emergence of the third world and the Non-Aligned Movement, whichever you like to call it. In one way, of course, U Thant could go much further because, being from the third world, he could say and do things which would not immediately be denounced as ~~said to be~~ colonialist or imperialist. In that way he had a certain amount more freedom, though not very much, ~~I don't think.~~ But it was a completely different situation, that period of the 1960s. ~~There was a~~ You didn't have either the extreme freeze of a cold phase of the cold war ...

GORDENKER: This is after Stalin's death, and -

URQUHART: Well, that was before. But I'm thinking of U Thant's period, which is 1961 to 1971, which is the period of the avalanche of independence. This whole Organization became something completely different in that period. The whole balance of voting changed in this Organization; the emphasis on particular subject matter changed very much.

I think one of the great sadnesses - to me, at any rate - of the death of Hammarskjold was that he would have been remarkable, I believe, as a leader in trying to tackle the world economic situation. ~~I think~~ This was something he was uniquely qualified to do, and, of course, the period when he was alive was

just before there was a chance ~~for you~~ to do that. I think he would have been extraordinary in that field, and, of course, U Thant had no qualifications in that at all. Anyhow, there we are.

GORDENKER: Did the emergence of the third world - or the Non-Aligned Movement - which might have been expected to be very sympathetic to Thant, lend him any additional credence as the holder of an important office?

URQUHART: I think it made him slightly less easy to criticize or put down, though not much. And, I must say that he was extremely scrupulous in not playing to that particular gallery. U Thant took his duties extremely seriously. He was meticulously fair, and ~~I think~~ very courageous in simply saying what he really thought and really trying to live up to the notion of objectivity and impartiality - at the same time not losing at any time his sense of moral outrage, which I think is very important. There were things which he regarded as absolutely unbearable, and he was prepared to say so.

GORDENKER: By implication you've said that there was something of a discontinuity after Hammarskjold's death and the time when U Thant began to get his hands around the Organization, that this was a time of confusion and disarray. You seem to say that Thant went some distance in finding concepts which he could apply to hold things together, but that with his succession to the office the style rather changed: he emphasized different points and came at it in a somewhat different way, although you emphasize his objectivity.

What would you say about the beginning of Waldheim's term of office, coming after Thant, who left the office a sick man - perhaps his last years in office were somewhat less energetic than his first - and here is the Organization, as you have sketched it, in a new political environment, with

many more new States, a more complex world, a good many changes, and the failure, which we'll discuss later, of the world to understand the 1967 crisis in the immediate background? Is this a discontinuity, or is this more of the same?

URQUHART: ~~Well, I think~~ Each of the Secretaries-General, perhaps even up to the present one, have tended to take over an Organization in very considerable disarray. After all, Hammarskjold took it over after a period of three years when the Soviet Union wouldn't even speak to the Secretary-General, and you had both the McCarthy business, the Korean War and the Soviet embargoing of the Secretary-General - so we were in pretty shaky condition then. You remember it.

U Thant took over, A, in the aftermath of a great tragedy, which was the death of Hammarskjold, but it wasn't only that: in the midst of a tremendous constitutional and practical crisis, because we were up to our necks in the soup in the Congo, there's no question of it. I know; I was there, and it was extremely difficult. Furthermore, we didn't know what the hell we were going to do next. So that he took over in a time of considerable disarray.

Waldheim took over at the end of a ten-year stint by U Thant, when U Thant had lost his credibility - I think unfairly, but nonetheless he had in 1967 - and on top of that had been sick for about three years. U Thant was desperate not to take a second term. I don't know exactly what his reasons were, but I suspect he knew that he was physically not up to it, and he was desperately anxious to hand over and he was literally drafted into it. I think that was a great mistake, and it was a terrible tragedy for him, because he did live most of his second term battling a [redacted] series of forms of exhaustion, illness and so on.

Waldheim, in ~~some~~ one sense, ~~this~~ took over a very tired Organization. But that wasn't the half of it, because Waldheim also took over two other great liabilities. One was the traumatic effect of the Congo experience and the 1967 Middle East War on the capacity of the Organization to get practically involved in matters of war and peace. I think it's impossible to estimate how traumatized people were, not so much by the physical happenings in the Congo, as of the constitutional and political tumult which resulted. People were always saying - and they still say it now, much to my annoyance, because I happen to think the Congo operation was rather successful - they're always saying that we must avoid another Congo. It is a synonym for everything that should not have happened - again, a very poor reading of history, but nonetheless there it is.

So he was already in a much less gung-ho position than his predecessors were, and, on top of that, you had a completely different Organization in terms of voting balance and interests. The great global-problems conferences of the 1970s were simply unheard of in the decade before: the environment, food, water, habitat, population and so on. So he was really getting into something completely different.

Waldheim ~~He~~ was also coming in at a time when the greatest Powers were getting fairly disillusioned with the United Nations because they no longer had an automatic majority in it, and that especially goes for the United States. Of course, there is the whole effect of all these changes on the way the Secretariat is made up and the way it's recruited and so on. It's a much more difficult Organization to run, it's much bigger, it's much more diverse, and so on. So I think one must understand what Waldheim was getting into. The bloom was very much off the rose when he took over this thing.

GORDENKER: Was he pretty clear about that in his own mind?

URQUHART: No, I don't think so at all. My early experiences - I got to like Waldheim [redacted], but my early experiences with him were not very happy in this respect. I think he thought that it was all due to the incompetence of his predecessor and his advisers, and it was a very ~~very~~ stupid thing to think. He should not have thought that, and he discovered to his own cost a little later on that it wasn't like that at all.

GORDENKER: You seem to be saying there, then, that Waldheim came into office with the assumption that there was a fundamental discontinuity and that his approach to the office should be a different one from his two or three predecessors.

URQUHART: I think Waldheim sort of saw the United Nations as a glorified version of the Austrian government. ~~- I mean originally~~. Greatly to his credit, he completely changed his view, but it seemed to me originally that he saw the United Nations as a kind of glorified version of the Austrian Foreign Office, which it certainly is not. That got him into all sorts of troubles and difficulties at the beginning. He had a very stormy initial period in this Organization. ~~But he had other problems too. I don't think that was the only one, but -~~

GORDENKER: From an institutional point of view, however, how did he see the institution? Was this an instrument with which he could operate? Was this something that he could play along steadily?

URQUHART: I don't think that Waldheim had these sort of conceptual notions of anything. He was very much a bureaucrat. Though, actually, I must say, a very energetic one, and, I think, a ~~very~~ well-intentioned one. But I don't think he - he certainly didn't formulate concepts which he then pursued into action, like Hammarskjold did. He couldn't do it.

GORDENKER: But he differed then also from Thant, who had some concepts.

URQUHART: Well, Thant I think had moral concepts about what the Organization should be doing and what he should be doing. And Waldheim didn't have those. I think Waldheim was much more of your Western European bureaucrat. ~~Which is nothing to be~~ There's nothing necessarily wrong with that, either. It just was a completely different idea of what it was about. He was much more of a ~~sort of~~ run-of-the-mill diplomat-bureaucrat.

GORDENKER: Do you want to comment on the way that Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar began his term of office?

URQUHART: Well, I think it's a little bit premature to do that. I have no objection. There again, you have a complete, a startling change of personality. Perez de Cuellar, in the first place, had quite a lot of experience in the Secretariat before he became Secretary-General. He did not seek the job. He was, I think very fortunately, the sort of last resort, and I think that was lucky for everybody. He is a completely different personality from his predecessors, ~~again~~ he's a rather quiet, reclusive man who prefers to appear to be very vague and preoccupied and, in fact, is extremely perceptive.

Again, he inherited a mess, because now we have the worst - I suppose the worst - general political climate we've ever had in this Organization. I don't think there's ever been anything as bad as it is now. You have a complete East-West stand-off accompanied by very disagreeable rhetoric on both sides; you have a total cynicism about the use even of the Security Council, which I regard as extremely short sighted; you have a great disillusion with all this from other countries and from the third world especially. ~~And~~ It is a very discouraging period, there's no question of it.

As a matter of fact, the conditions, on the political side at any rate and also on the economic side, simply do not exist in this ideological climate where you can really begin to make the optimum use, on any subject, of the machinery of the United Nations. It has been totally - for the moment - undermined. I mean, it's just been washed away by the ideological conflict. It's like a railroad which has no underpinning, and until we get something built up under it again, I think it's going to be very difficult to work it. So I think one has to judge Perez de Cuellar in the light of what he's trying to deal with.

GORDENKER: I want to backtrack now a bit and talk a little bit about the election of the Secretary-General and see whether you have any observations on that process. You were around the Organization during each one of these elections, and indeed very close to it, and that includes the election of Trygve Lie, because at that point you were serving Gladwyn Jebb in the United Kingdom, and the United Kingdom certainly had a great deal to do with the selection of Trygve Lie.

What do you think about this selection process? What difference does it make to the Secretary-General? What difference did it make to each one of these people who held the office?

URQUHART: Well, you know, as usual in public life, there's a vast gulf between intentions and rhetoric, and nasty, low-down, real interest. I mean, the ~~great~~ idea of the Secretary-General was that he was the great moderator, he was Jesus Christ come back to earth, he was going to make all the difference, and so on. And actually, nobody had the smallest intention - in my view - of letting that happen.

We got by accident an extraordinarily good initial ~~sort of~~ temporary Secretary-General in Gladwyn Jebb. He was absolutely remarkable, but of course he wasn't the Secretary-General, he was just the organizer. Then they set about looking for someone, the West wishing to elect either Mike Pearson or Eisenhower and the East having no intention of allowing any great figure from the West to take over. So you had a big mess right there.

GORDENKER: Was that because the East had a different conception of the office, or was it for other reasons?

URQUHART: No, it was because they weren't going to let the West get away with any serious degree of control of ~~a situation where they had - which might have got round the veto -~~ the organization

GORDENKER: So the issue was -

URQUHART: - because the thing about the Secretary-General is, he's not subject to the veto once he's in, and they knew it. So they weren't going to have Eisenhower or Pearson - or General Romulo, come to that. By the same token, the West were not going to have - I forget the name of the various Soviet candidates. There was a Pole and a Yugoslav, and I forget who else, and they weren't going to have anything to do with them.

So ~~in the end~~ you ended up, as usual, with the lowest common denominator, which was a safe, fairly obscure figure from a very small country. To illustrate how cynical people were, I remember - my job during the election of Trygve was as sort of clerk of the General Assembly and also the personal assistant to Jebb, and I used to sit at the table where the speakers now register in our present arrangement. ~~There are about sixty people doing the job I used to do, but there it is, doesn't matter.~~ Mr. Stettinius, who was then the American Secretary of State, came charging over - this was when the

election was about to begin - and said, "Brian, which is Mr. Lie [prounounced as in falsehood]?" and I said, "I don't understand what you're talking about," and he said, "Mr. Lie of Norway," and I said, "Oh, you mean Mr. Lie [pronounced "Lee"]?" He said, "Yes, Mr. 'Lee'." So I said, "Well, he's that fat chap over there in the butcher-blue suit." And Stettinius said, "Thank you very much," and he went straight up to the rostrum and said: "On behalf of the United States, I wish to nominate a man who is a household world for all of us, a symbol of heroism and so on," and he went on for about five minutes about Trygve and then pronounced his name wrong. He'd never heard of him before. That was typical. It was a lot of bullshit. It really was disgusting. And that was my first great disillusionment in this Organization. I've never forgotten it.

Then, of course, when Lie resigned - there was one theory that he wished to be reelected against the Soviet Union, and I think that's unfair; I don't think he did - then they went searching around all over the place and, by pure accident, picked up somebody who was exactly the opposite to what everybody wanted. They thought they'd got a safe, bureaucratic civil servant, non-political, and they got Hammarskjold. ~~Well, I mean,~~ It'll never happen again, ~~I don't think~~; nobody's ever going to make that mistake twice. Now, of course, everybody thinks they liked Hammarskjold, but they didn't; they didn't like Hammarskjold one little bit, especially the great Powers. They couldn't stand him. Now, of course, they regard him as having wings and a halo, but not at the time. They all had tremendous rows with him.

I think the worse thing that's happened in the process, however, is that it used to be a genuine search - at least in theory - for the right candidate, who was designated by the Council and then, on the Council's suggestion, was

elected by the General Assembly. And ~~it was when U Thant~~ after the end of U Thant's second term - that for the first time somebody actually campaigned for the office, and it was Max Jacobsen of Finland. He began campaigning something like 18 months before, and I think that was a very very great disservice to the whole concept.

GORDENKER: Why?

URQUHART: Because what it meant was, that instead of having a serious search for somebody who could do the job, you had in fact a kind of primary electoral campaign, and everybody began to argue political reasons for this or that candidate. And, of course, it reached a climax of broad farce in the election in 1980, when Waldheim persisted in running for a third term - which I think was a colossal mistake and, furthermore, very bad for the office, ~~- and then you had this ghastly run in which you had a third-world candidate and candidates who were supposed to be safer than others, and so on.~~ It was really terrible; it was a nightmare.

GORDENKER: But you seem to reject the notion that one of the ways in which a Secretary-General can ensure himself of national support is to organize his election.

URQUHART: No, I don't think it's the right way to do it. When Hammarskjold was nominated, the proceedings were completely secret, in a closed meeting of the Security Council, ~~to the extent that when Hammarskjold~~ - somebody told Frank Carpenter, who was the Associated Press correspondent here - one of the members of the Council came out to take a leak and happened to meet Frank hanging around the corridor and, quite wrongly, told him who the candidate was, and Carpenter put it on the AP wire about two hours ahead of anybody else. And the AP correspondent in Stockholm went to

Hammarskjold and said, "We understand you've been designated as Secretary-General of the United Nations," and it was April the first, and Hammarskjold said, "That's an April Fool's Day joke in extremely bad taste: it's nonsense!" and he had never heard of it. He didn't even know his name was on the slate. That, I think was the right way to do it.

Now, everybody knows ~~God, do they not!~~ every damn' fool candidate ~~is known~~ months in advance, ~~and I think it's~~ a very bad system, because the point about the Secretary-Generalship is that it shouldn't be a political office. ~~It really is a~~ he really is a civil servant, and if he's nominated and elected by a highly political process it already puts him in a very peculiar light - and actually, Perez de Cuellar has escaped that, having come in absolutely at the last minute, not at his own suggestion, to sort of fill the gap. So he doesn't have that problem, but everybody else has had it: Waldheim had it; U Thant didn't have it, he was just designated.

There are people running for the Secretary-Generalship all over the bloody world now. I can name ten of them. It's really tedious. It's the wrong idea; they've got the wrong process. It isn't what it says in the Charter, ~~it does not say that~~, and quite rightly.

GORDENKER: All right. Let's stop here for one minute.

GORDENKER: Several times in the course of what you've been saying you used the term "political". In the writing on the United Nations, that great mass of turgid material most of which I guess I've read, it's very often said that the office of the Secretary-General really has a political function and this is a political organization. What does it mean in terms of the office of the Secretary-General? What does political mean? What are people getting at when they talk this way? What did you mean when you used the

term? What is meant when you and your colleagues on the thirty-eighth floor talk abour political?

URQUHART: Well, it obviously is a political organization basically, isn't it? I mean it deals with political problems ~~to a very large~~ ...

GORDENKER: What's a political problem? What do you mean by a political problem?

URQUHART: Well, the problems between States in which the whole range of political cause and effect operates, including national politics, international politics, economics, social stresses, religious - you name it - it's a very wide range of actions and reactions over a very wide scale and I think the only way you can possibly refer to it is "political", and of course, it is also dealt with, theoretically at any rate, within a political framework, which is the Charter.

The idea originally - though I could never see quite why - was that the basic function of the Secretary-General was as the chief administrative officer and that the political stuff went on between sovereign States, ~~and~~ this, I suppose, might have been truer if it hadn't been that the sovereign States very early on showed themselves incapable of agreeing on a series of essential matters and so you needed somebody to turn to.

But I don't think that because it's a political organization the Secretary-General should be a politician. On the contrary, I think it's the one thing he should avoid being. He is, in fact, a very important element in what should be an international system, but he must remain above the political conflicts of the time, he must remain above the rivalries, and only if he does that and resists the temptation to align himself with this or that group can he really fulfil the function which is intended. Roosevelt was the person who

suggested the best title for the Secretary-General, which was "Moderator", and then it turned out it got confused with the Church of Scotland, so that they got Secretary-General instead, but that was the original suggestion and that really is what he has to be, and that is a political function by someone who is not a politician himself, and I think when Secretary-Generals have got into politics, they've got into a very nasty mess, or when they have been suspected of getting into politics or have been seen to get into politics, even if it wasn't true, they have usually then run into trouble. Now that does limit very much the kind of things the Secretary-General can do, but it seems to me that it also indicates that there is a very very important function, especially in extreme cases where no one else can deal with problems.

Now let's just take for example a few cases in point now.

GORDENKER: I was hoping you'd do that.

URQUHART: Nobody wants to deal with the Cyprus problem, nor can, for various very complicated strategic, geopolitical and other reasons, so we deal with it. We are the only going concern in the Cyprus negotiations and though it may be like Penelope's web, we go on doing it because an absence of negotiations would make the situation even worse.

GORDENKER: What are you aiming at?

URQUHART: Well, we're aiming at a settlement, but of course it may well be unattainable. But the process of negotiation maintains a certain equilibrium in the island, which, mixed up with the peace-keeping business, prevents the thing from blowing up and that - I am beginning to think - may well be the final achievement in Cyprus, because nobody, as far as I know, believes at the moment it's possible to have a settlement. It's ludicrous, but there it is.

Let's take Afghanistan. Now, there's a lot of stout talk all round the world about Afghanistan and a great deal of frothing and grain embargoes and repeal of grain embargoes and refusing to take part in the Olympic Games and that kind of thing. But the plain fact of the matter is that no one physically can touch the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. And that is why the only negotiating process going on now is a negotiation process run by the Secretary-General. And everybody feels very free to criticize it all the time, and they do, because when Congressmen get up and ask what in the hell is the United States doing about Afghanistan, the Government knows perfectly well they can't actually do anything about Afghanistan without risking a nuclear war and so they say "Well, the Secretary-General of the United Nations is coping with Afghanistan", and then, off the record, they say, "and is really getting nowhere, it's simply hopeless, and we are constantly goading him to further efforts." If we asked them if they said that, they would deny it, but the fact of the matter is they do say it. Okay, fine.

The Gulf - the Iran-Iraq war is a classic case of the problem. The Security Council, when Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, behaved - I must say - in a way that would have made the writers of the Charter turn in their graves, because everybody sat on their hands for three weeks and hoped the Iraqis would overturn the Ayatollah - a very foolish notion - and anyhow, as a matter of principle, an entirely indefensible stance. It doesn't matter a damn whether you like or dislike the Ayatollah Khomeini; the fact of the matter was that one State had invaded another and it says in the Charter you can't do that, though if ever there was a case when the Security Council should have intervened right there, that was it. I even wrote a poem about it. And the only person who brought the bloody thing to the Security Council was the

Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, and was roundly abused for his pains, as a matter of fact. Then the Council realized the war was for keeps; it was a serious business and might even - God help us all - cause a rise in the oil price ultimately, if it went on long enough, ~~so that was really terrible.~~ And then they got into a great sweat and started passing resolutions and the Iranians looked everybody squarely in the eye and said "Where were you when we needed you? You were nowhere. You can take your resolutions and ..."

GORDENKER: Remove them.

URQUHART: Exactly. "And we will deal with the Secretary-General of the United Nations because he was the only one who ever stood up for us at the beginning, not because he particularly liked us - he didn't, because we'd had a little run-in over the hostages just before - but the fact of the matter is he's the only person who stated the principle, so we will deal with him."

So what it boiled down to is the only channel left which the Iranians will accept in the Gulf war is the Secretary-General and Olof Palme, who is his Special Representative. A fat lot of good it does anybody, because the Iranians are not ready to end the war for the time being. They do not propose to end the war now until they get rid of Saddam Hussein, which ~~I must say~~ in view of what happened I suppose is understandable enough.

But the fact of the matter is that this is a situation which neither of the super-Powers can touch, so they're very happy with the Secretary-General. And again they're very happy to point out that the Secretary-General really is asleep at the switch and that he's not doing his best and so we get a lot of stuff in the papers about that. ~~I don't care at all.~~

~~But I mentioned those things because he should not be politically involved, he~~ the Secretary-General should be involved as the moderator, mediator, go-between, honest

broker - whatever you like - the person who everybody can trust, the person who is regarded by everybody as objective.

And we have that same thing in the peace-keeping operations - well people are a little less vocal about the peace-keeping operations than they were before the MNF (the multinational force in Beirut) disaster as a matter of fact, I've noticed, and about time too - because the fact of the matter about peace-keeping operations is that they are a confidence-building operation and it takes years and you have to be above the struggle. If you think you're going to go in there with all guns blazing and score a fabulous victory as a peace-keeping force, you've had it, and that's why I've always refused to let our people have anything but personal weapons and the generals don't like it, but there it is, they can't use them even if they have them - no way. They have to stay above the conflict; they have to be objective; ~~and they have to be~~ they're really in the position of the attendants in a lunatic asyslum - they have to take a lot of harassment and abuse, but in the end they're the ones who hold the ring and keep the thing reasonably going, and if they start getting down on the floor with the loonies and fighting it out, then they've lost their position, that's the end of it, and this is something we have to realize.

And I think the Secretary-General is in that position too. I mean, he has a terrible problem because all the Secretaries-General are human beings like everybody else and mostly very decent people, and they don't particularly like to sit around and appear to be pussyfooting and get told by the New York Times that they're not taking a courageous stance or something. On the other hand, if they do what in national politics is a courageous stance, they lose all usefulness. I mean, we can go out and blast the Turks in Cyprus and I can tell you exactly what will happen: we will be out of business

totally, for ever, either in the peace-making or the peace-keeping field; they will say good-bye and then there really will be a mess and everybody will have even more trouble than they do already. So we have to face that.

GORDENKER: So there seem to be two kinds of possible roles here: one is an intermediary role and another role is a kind of interventionary role in which the Secretary-General makes suggestions as to a settlement. The intermediary role is passive and the mediatory role is a more active one. Do I describe accurately and conceptually -

URQUHART: - Well, this is correct, this is actually the correct definition of mediation in law too. It's having the right to make propositions.

GORDENKER: Now what about the Secretary-General making propositions? Each one of them has made propositions. How has that worked?

URQUHART: It depends how you do it. Mediator is a dirty word in quite a number of conflict situations. It is a dirty word with the Israelis, for example; it's a dirty word with the Turks after Galo Plaza's efforts in 19667, and the moment you call yourself a mediator you're through with both of those parties

So that is why Gunnar Jarring was called the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and even then, when Gunnar made a series of proposals which, incidentally, seven years later were the basis of the Camp David Agreement, they were thrown out completely by the Israelis on the grounds he'd exceeeded his mandate. In fact the Jarring proposal of 1971 is ~~absolutely~~ almost ~~exactly~~ word for word the basis of the Camp David Agreement, which was accepted after great pressure from the United States later on.

~~But the fact of the matter is that even that,~~ even though he wasn't ~~called a mediator -- I mean,~~ mediation is a active thing - of course, you can do the same thing in other terms if you get to know everybody well enough, but you've got to pick the right time and you've got to pick the way you put proposals forward. We put forward endless proposals on the Cyprus problem. They are just short of being formal public propositions laid on the table and it's always a very dicey business, but that is not the same as being a mediator where you say "Boys, this is the plan, take it or leave it, or let us see if we can negotiate it". That's a very difficult thing to do in international affairs.

GORDENKER: Are there any specific instances in which the mediation of the Secretary-General succeeded?

URQUHART: Well, it depends what you mean by mediation. We have had actually -

GORDENKER: As you put it just now.

URQUHART: - we've had the mediator in the Middle East, which was Bernadotte and ~~when~~ after he was killed, Bunche. The main upshot of that mission was not at all what the mediator was put in there to do, which was to mediate a settlement. Actually, what we got was the Armistice Agreements, which was already a very remarkable achievement by Bunche. And those were mediation, because Bunche put forward the draft of the Agreements and then negotiated them between the two sides in each case. I think he was the only other mediator, I don't think we ever had a mediator on Kashmir, as far as I remember; we had a plebiscite administrator, which is something different. But then, of course, we never had a plebiscite, so that wasn't much good. But the mediator on Cyprus put forward a proposition at which the Turks took

violent umbrage and that was the end of the mediator, because one of the sides disowned him. So that was the end of him.

Almost the same thing effectively happened to Jarring, who wasn't a mediator. I suppose the most successful copybook good offices ~~meeting~~ Operation we've ever had was the one on the future of Bahrain, which was totally successful, and that was a very elaborate face-saving device by which the claims of everybody could finally with good grace be dropped on the establishment of the will of the people of Bahrain by the Secretary-General. It was a very, very complicated operation. It took 18 months. And I think that was a perfect way of doing things. ~~The only trouble was that everybody was being rather reasonable for various reasons at that time and it doesn't usually happen, but Cyprus isn't a bit like that.~~

GORDENKER: Well, how much initiative does the office of the Secretary-General have in this sort of thing?

URQUHART: Well, if you don't draw too much attention to it, quite a bit. I mean actually the Secretary-General spends most of his time doing things which don't ever get into the press at all. There are all sorts of difficulties between States or human rights cases or threats or things like that which a little bit of private talking may be able to help, and they don't get any publicity. And of course if they succeed, they might as well never have happened, because nobody wants to admit to it. I think that's the right way to operate. Again, it's treated with great contempt in some quarters. I mean, it's thought that the Amnesty International approach of denouncing is more effective than our approach, which is the opposite. ~~I think it's very doubtful, that, I mean~~ I think we can say that we probably, especially with Governments, have more success by going to them quietly and saying "Look, do

yourselves some good. Do not execute the ex-Prime Minister and the ex-Foreign Minister or release this group from gaol, or allow these people to leave or something", which we do a great deal of, we do it all the time. But of course you don't get any glory for that because the whole essence of the thing is it's discreet and the credit goes to the Government for doing something sensible and humane. I wish we could do it with the Sakharovs, but I think the ground has been trampled too much for that to happen.

GORDENKER: Well, Drummond did a lot of this in the days of the League of Nations and won a lot of credit for it, again behind the scenes. Drummond was a trusted man and could take certain initiatives and it's developed in recent years, as a result of historical investigations, that indeed Drummond was really deeply involved in day-to-day negotiations and very often was prepared to make suggestions. The credit that accrued to Drummond does not seem to have attached to the UN Secretary-General as a result of the day-to-day successes of which you speak.

URQUHART: Well I think people are rather more blasé now about international institutions and you've got to remember that Drummond was operating in a very much smaller pool than we are. He was operating essentially in a European environment, with a few expeditions into the Gran Chaco, but not much. And I don't think that the situations are comparable. And of course, ~~Lord~~ Drummond also had the great advantage of being British, the British then being one of the top nations, and you can bet that they took a lot of trouble, through their own machinery, to make quite sure that everybody realized what a hot shot Drummond was. ~~We don't have, actually, too many (?) clerks of that kind around in our little outfit. And I think it's not bad. I don't mind it.~~ It does seem to me that eventually most of this

will come out. I think one of the worst things about the UN is that is has no historical section and therefore it's extremely hard for any outsider, ~~let alone - well, even insiders -~~ to discover what really has happened. I mean, ~~what - you know,~~ -

GORDENKER: I agree with you.

URQUHART: When I wrote a biography of Hammarskjöld, I dug up a whole lot of things which Hammarskjöld had done which nobody had ever heard of. They were simply in Hammarskjöld's private papers and he hadn't bothered to do anything except make a note saying. "I made a strong representation about the death sentence on so and so and was glad to find that after a bit and so on...". But of course, if things don't happen, you can't prove you did them. ~~I mean, you can't really prove~~ I think the essential point about the method we try to use in human rights cases, for example, is ~~the whole point should be~~ to give a motivation for doing the right thing to the authorities in question. Now there's no way they're going to do it if you condemn them publicly, because it then becomes a matter of prestige. If they do something sensible, then they should take all the credit for it because that might encourage them to do some more, ~~and if you don't do that you don't start a chain of - I mean,~~ I don't think we'll ever improve the human rights situation very much until Governments discover that they actually in the long term get a lot of kudos from behaving well. It's a completely new concept in most parts of the world, ~~incidentally~~, I mean, human rights is not the most talked-of thing in most of the third world. ~~They'd just never heard of it and nor had we until very recently.~~

GORDENKER: Let's talk for a minute along the lines of one point that you made. You said Drummond was British and the British were very careful to see to it that his advertising was good. The British were also very careful to keep him informed.

URQUHART: That's right.

GORDENKER: The documents show that he had a constant flow of information and advice from the British Foreign Office. Does the UN Secretary-General have anything like this?

URQUHART: Unfortunately, no. I think it's one of the great problems and I don't know what's to be done about it. We do not have any intelligence service; we do have quite good information on areas where we have operations, for example, the Middle East or Cyprus. We probably know as much as anybody does about those, thought we don't know the secret stuff and make no effort to find it on the grounds that intelligence gathering is a sovereign activity and therefore liable to be misunderstood.

GORDENKER: Covert intelligence gathering?

URQUHART: Well, whatever you like to call it. I don't think that any of the Secretaries-General - Hammarskjöld probably had a lot of access, though I don't know it, to, for example, the Swedish diplomatic traffic, which is probably pretty sophisticated. U Thant had very little of that. Waldheim had not too much access, I think, to anything. Lee, I think, had no access at all, as far as I know, and it is a great problem. ~~I mean, if you had a Secretary-General from a great Power it would obviously be much easier for them to - we actually do get a great deal of information from Governments.~~

GORDENKER: Are you satisfied with the information you get?

URQUHART: Not really, because it's not a consistent flow. I mean, what would be nice is to be totally informed all the time about a particular situation and we aren't. I mean, if I ask, let us say, the British or the Americans or the French for information on a particular thing, I can be pretty sure to get it, within reason, but it's not the same thing as having the

telegrams coming in all the time reporting on the development of, let's say, the situation in Lebanon or something like that.

GORDENKER: Well how do you avoid flying by the seat of your pants?

URQUHART: Well, we don't. There are worse ways to fly actually -

GORDENKER: Down, I guess.

URQUHART: If I may say so, I mean, having done a certain amount of flying, because, as a matter of fact the worst thing of all is too much information. It's much worse - an informed guess or talking to the local taxi-driver is very often better than the reams of stuff that come pouring in to highly sophisticated Governments.

~~I mean,~~ the greatest example of that - in my knowledge, at any rate - is the Egyptian attack across the Canal in 1973, ~~which~~ both the Israelis and the United States had monitored by satellite, aerial reconnaissance and ordinary intelligence for weeks and they knew exactly what was on the Canal, on the Egyptian side. The only trouble was that they has a fatal psychological flaw, which is that they believed the British myth that the Egyptians were never prepared to fight and so they ignored it. ~~And~~ We knew ~~all of that~~ the situation. ~~I mean, we had observed the whole thing, because~~ We had observers on the Canal ~~there~~. But any warning that the Egyptians might be about to do something fell on deaf ears, simply because there was a total psychological block, and also they had so much information that I don't think they paid much attention to it.

~~I mean, for example, everybody~~ - We knew perfectly well that there was going to be a coup against Makarios in 1974, a totally disastrous action, incidentally, and we spent a lot of time trying to alert people like Kissinger to the fact that something pretty scaly was going to happen against Makarios - by the Greeks, not by the Turks - and whether it was regarded as small beer or

whether they genuinely didn't want to hear about it, they ignored it and nothing was done to head off the Greek colonels, although it was perfectly obvious that something was going to happen - I mean, when you blow up 35 post offices in a week it's an awful lot of post offices to blow up, you know, ~~it's not normal is it~~? And that's what happened. And we said "You know, we know exactly who's doing this, the EOKA-B, there's no question and everybody knows they're run from Athens and they're doing it to discredit the Archbishop. They're going to go for him and when they go for him the Turks will come in - no question." Nobody tried to stop it. Now why was that? So I don't really have this undying faith in in-depth floods of intelligence. I don't really believe it. I think you've got to have a fairly good idea of what people are like and I think you have to have a reasonable sort of suspicion of what they're going to do and as much ~~sort of~~ operational information as you can get. And we don't have that in a lot of places.

GORDENKER: One of the -

URQUHART: But then, after all, if you look at the British, I mean their performance over the Falklands beats anything. ~~I mean~~, what on earth did they suppose the Argentinians were doing in all those boats? It's really amazing if you come to think of it, isn't it?

GORDENKER: Going out for a swim.

URQUHART: When there were 24 Marines on the Falkland Islands. I mean, I don't know what they thought they were doing. I think they were just thoroughly lazy.

GORDENKER: But surely if the Office of the Secretary-General is to work as an intermediary and in some cases a kind of informal mediator, timing is very important and knowledge of the edges of the problem - how far does it extend, where do you hit it - is very important. How do you get this analysis? How do you manage this?

URQUHART: ~~Well, you see, I don't think the timing thing is that - I~~ mean, either you have a sense of timing or you don't. It isn't really a matter of information or even organization, and I think timing really boils down to having a very good grasp of what P. G. Wodehouse calls the psychological factor. I mean, you've really got to have some idea about how the other chap feels, ~~and I mean~~ it's all in one ten-line passage in Markings, there is a marvellous description of how you should deal with other people, and one of the things is that you must experience the other person's troubles, you must be able to experience them subjectively in order to know what he's feeling. And if you understand that in negotiations or in any situation you're already miles ahead of the game. Of course, the difficulty is trying to find the best possible sort of constellation of circumstances in which to make a positive step and that is very difficult and very often you end up not making one at all.

I mean, for example, the Secretary-General was about to use Article 99 on the Gulf - when was it? - ten days ago when they started shooting at all these ships in a big way and then he suddenly discovered at the very last minute that the Gulf States had called a Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Arab League and were going to come to the Council and had sent Abdullah Bishara here as a special envoy, ~~and there was no way he'd proceed with it~~. Actually, now, looking back on it, I wish the Secretary-General had proceeded with it because I think he'd have done better than the Arabs, but I don't suppose the Arabs would have thought so and after all it's their Gulf.

GORDENKER: Now Article 99: is that the ultimate weapon, or is it the base of action?

URQUHART: I don't think Article 99 is a weapon at all. It is a very broad constitutional gimmick on which virtually all of the Secretary-General's political activity not ordered by one or other of the inter-governmental organs is based. I mean, without that Article it would be very difficult for the Secretary-General to do any of the political stuff he does outside the ~~kind of~~ list of subjects on the formal agenda.

What it says is that ~~you~~ the Secretary-General can bring ~~things~~ ominous situations to the attention of the Security Council. Well, we do that absolutely all the time and I can tell you, a lot of trouble we get for our pains too, because the Council does not want to buy trouble, they just don't want to get into anything unless they absolutely have their noses rubbed in it, ~~and the result is that the Secretary-General, though~~ you don't have to invoke Article 99 necessarily, I mean, for example, Waldheim brought, ~~let's see - he~~ brought the Cyprus situation to the Council in the 1974 disaster, he brought the Lebanese civil war to the Council and was told to shut up by everybody, ~~he brought the -~~ there are several others - I can't remember. We spent six months trying to get the Council to look into what was then the East Pakistan situation, which led to the Bangladesh war. No way. Nobody wanted to hear about it. Waldheim brought the Iran-Iraq war to the Council because nobody else would and everybody said "That's very embarassing for all of us. Why did you do that?" It isn't really invoking Article 99, according to the language, it's really doing a whole series of things which are in the genreal spirit of 99. It doesn't prove anything unless you can get Governments to ~~go along with~~ act on it.

GORDENKER: Has the office of Secretary-General evolved to the point where you can say that the steps in using Article 99 are thoroughly understood and that the implications are thoroughly understood so that you know where to

stop before formally invoking Article 99? Do you feel confident of this up in your office?

URQUHART: No, because ~~I think really that Article 99 is~~ I think there's a great deal less in Article 99 than meets the eye. I mean, it sounds pretty good, but the only time Hammarskjöld invoked it was over the Congo and before he invoked it he talked to every single member of the Security Council. He said "I'm going to invoke it and I want your support", and they said okay, to everybody's intense surprise, and that's the only reason ~~they~~ he invoked it. Waldheim invoked it over the hostages in Iran.

GORDENKER: He had full support?

URQUHART: Well, for a time, like Hammarskjöld on the Congo, he had full support for a very short time and then it all fell to bits. And I think that if you can crystallize that support at the moment when it matters and establish a basis for action - which is what was done on the hostages - I mean, the merit of what Waldheim did was that they got through a decision in the Council on the Hostages at the optimum time. After that the support for the whole thing fell to bits as it always does. The British had the greatest success of all on that on the Falklands. ~~I mean,~~ They rammed this resolution through on the very first day of the invasion by Argentina, and it was a resolution they could never have got on any succeeding day ever. They just got it through in time and it was due to a lot of extremely fancy footwork, too, but they got it through.

But actually, of course, what the Secretary-General does from day-to-day is basically under the general rubric of Article 99. What other Article gives him an opportunity to meddle in political ~~matters~~ affairs by Member States? Nothing.

GORDENKER: Yes, that's right; that's the legal basis. But much of what we've been saying this afternoon is pretty far detached from strict legal procedures carefully based by the lawyers on Council supervision.

URQUHART: Well, ~~I think - really, to sum it up a little bit, and I'm sorry to ramble so much, but~~ it seems to me that, in the first place, the Secretary-Generalship was intended to be something else. It was intended to be the sort of chief steward in a perfect world where the lion would lie down with the lamb and the five Permanent Members would always agree on important matters - which is lot of bullshit if you come to think of it, but nonetheless that's what the Charter says. And ~~instead,~~ this didn't happen. So you have to have someone who can go as far as the going will bear, and that really, basically, is what the Secretary-General had to try to do.

Now, I think there's one exception to that rule. I think that if - God forbid - any Secretary-General came to the conclusion that there was a situation of absolutely overwhelming danger for general survival, he would then have to regard himself as totally expendable and go public, appeal to people over the heads of their Governments, ~~really - and~~ that is one of the reasons why I think it's important that the Secretary-General, whoever he is, should have a certain amount o histrionic talent concealed somewhere in the back there. Because it could come to it, ~~that you would get a really~~ It nearly happened in the Cuban missile crisis.

~~In fact, I think people have now forgotten, because~~ All the memoirs have shown how brilliantly Kennedy or Krushchev or whoever ~~it was~~ behaved, but what everybody has forgotten is that the gimmick which got them off the confrontation was two letters written by U Thant, which started off to both of them saying, "Dear Old Krushchev" or "Dear Old Kennedy, I'm sure you don't

want to go down in history as the guy who blew up the world, so I am making the following proposal to you, and I am making another proposal or several proposals to Mr. Krushchev, by which you can get away from the conflict, and specifically the confrontation in the Atlantic, which is the proximate cause of World War Three at the time being."

~~And~~ To everybody's intense astonishment, Krushchev accepted it, and that was the beginning of the break. Now, I think it's good that everybody else could take credit for this, but that was what I mean by saying that at some point you have to have a guy who will go for broke. That's why I admire U Thant. He never had a single doubt about sending that letter, though a more cautious man would have wondered whether he wasn't going to get the most fantastic public rebuff; and he said, "I don't care, it doesn't matter, it's very dangerous; after all, we're talking about the future of the human race".

At that time ~~You know~~, people were leaving New York carrying the Vermeer under their arm and going to Arizona. It was simply amazing - I remember it very well. It was a very panicky period. ~~And I think that that was the right thing to do. But short of that, I think he has to press things as far as the going will bear and not press them further, because if he presses them further he gets into the dilemma that Hammarskjold got into, where he really pushed the thing so far that he was not on speaking terms with either Krushchev or De Gaulle and was boycotted by both Governments.~~

GORDENKER: Right.

URQUHART: And was on pretty shaky terms, incidentally, with the British and the Americans. So that it wasn't so hot.

GORDENKER: Did he anticipate that?

URQUHART: He believed that the reason why he had been disowned by Krushchev was nothing to do with the Congo. ~~I think this is very far fetched~~, ~~myself.~~ ~~He~~ Hammarskjold believed that the moment Krushchev proposed completely disarmament, he knew it would give the Secretary-General an absolutely ~~keep~~ key role in the whole inspection business which was a key part of it, and that if you had a Western Secretary-General that would skew the whole process. And therefore, on the off chance that anybody accepted complete disarmament, you'd better get a troika in which the Russians had a veto, which was the origin of the troika.

Do you believe that? I'm not so sure. I doubt it.

GORDENKER: I've never seen anything to make me believe it.

URQUHART: Well, this was Hammarskjold's belief. ~~I don't necessarily think~~ it's a very complicated reason, certainly.

GORDENKER: There are two questions that I'd like to raise this afternoon. I don't think we'll be able to get at both of them, but they're consistent with what we've been discussing.

One of them has to do with the public image of the Secretary-General, the way in which the Secretary-General relates to broader publics, and who they are, and why they are, and how this operates.

The other question is the organization of his office: who does he get in his office and why, and for what purpose, and how does he handle this?

Which one do you want to tackle?

URQUHART: Let's take the first one. It's something I feel very strongly about, not that it'll do anybody any good.

GORDENKER: You might want to do this comparatively.

URQUHART: I think that, in the first place, public relations, ~~unfortunately~~, whether one likes it or not, is now terribly important. The

time has gone when things were slowed up ~~and so on~~ sufficiently that the ultimate in real worth of a person could come across over a period of years to the electorate, which in our case is the whole world. So, you need to do something else. I think Trygve was very lucky because, after all, the United Nations had a very good public image after the war. It was the great new hope, millenium. Actually, we've suffered from that ever since. It was a great mistake to have put it across like this, but nonetheless, there it was.

Hammarskjold had on the whole surprisingly good public relations because he was rather like Greta Garbo. He was a mysterious, interesting man, obviously engaged in very important matters in a slightly lonely, heroic way. ~~He really was in an extraordinary sense -~~ There's an extraordinary cartoon by Low - I don't think you've ever seen it - when Hammarskjold was trying to reinforce the armistice agreements in the Middle East after various nonsenses in 1955, ~~and there's a cartoon by Low of~~ - there had just been a colossal shoot out between the Israelis and the Egyptians in Gaza, as I remember it, and Hammarskjold drove down the armistice demarcation line just with a driver, in a jeep, and a lot of people said, "You can't do that, you'll get killed!" and he said, "I don't care, I'm going to do it. I just want to prove a point, that this is what ~~this~~ it is: this is an armistice demarcation line." And he got away with it, and there was a cartoon by Low of this episode with Hammarskjold in a jeep and Ben Gurion on one side and Nasser on the other firing like mad from dugouts, and Low saying "How many divisions has the United Nations got?" And it was a marvelous thing.

I think he was very good at fixing this sort of image, and also ~~he was a very~~ - he had just that element of obscurity and mystery that really fascinated people ~~conquered~~. The press were never bored with him. And also, of course, he was

lucky because he got into a series of extremely dramatic actions: the American prisoners in China, Suez and the first peace-keeping force, Lebanon in 1958 and, ~~unfortunately,~~ latterly the Congo, which was a disaster for him, as it turned out, but it was a very unique and ~~kind of~~ innovative affair. In my view, as I said before, far from being a disaster, I think it was remarkably successful, given what we were up against. But anyhow.

U Thant was hopeless at public relations and was regarded as an expressionless oriental, and people made no attempt to see that there are other things in the world beside being a Western hot shot. I thought that was a provincial approach, because, as you can easily see, I have a strong proclivity for U Thant. I think he was a remarkable man.

Waldheim, I regret to say, had a terrible problem, and I say it with regret because I liked him. But he had, I must say, without exception the worst public personality of anyone I have ever encountered. I don't know how he managed it, but he could turn any audience off. It was something to do with his rather ingratiating manner of speaking, the way he looked - it just was very unfair, and no amount of suggesting he change the approach ever did any good. I don't know why this was, it just was: he just had a very unfortunate public personality. And I think that was very bad luck because I think he was a ~~great~~ good deal better man than he appeared.

It's too soon to say about Perez de Cuellar. He was extremely popular at the beginning, largely because he was a change from Waldheim, and I don't know how well that's going to hold up in the third year. Because the trouble with him is that he has been unable to chalk up a recognizable success. He damn nearly did it on the Falklands, and then, unfortunately, the Argentinians threw out the proposal. He did very well on that, and I don't think anybody could have done better, ~~but - and that is one of his problems.~~

~~But it doesn't really even approach the real problem.~~ The real problem, I think, is to try to get people to see what we all do as a serious part of their lives and something they may well one day be dependent on. And in the third world they're dependent on it already, after all, in many respect. You've got to see it - I always remind the Israelis, when they go on about the United Nations, that the decision which totally defeated the Arab world forever as far as they were concerned was the Security Council order to cease fire on July 17th, 1948. Bunche wrote in his diaries, "This is the end of the Arab resistance, and I feel a great responsibility for it, having managed to persuade the Security Council to do it."

And it's true. But people forget that there are times when something happens here which is absolutely decisive historically for them, and they only see it much later. We never have managed to get that across at all. We have, in my view, made a fatuous effort to inform the public, which bores them. We have a committee structure which is enough to turn anybody off - I mean, I can't stay awake for a single minute in one of these things, can you? It's really terrible. I don't know how we get away from it, because it's a representative Organization; on the other hand, it's a nightmare public relationswise.

Most of the really good things we do, we would publish at the peril of completely destroying them, because they are based on face saving, on giving Governments the opportunity to do something sensible, on trying to give credit to other people in order to persuade them to go in the right direction. So, I don't know what the solution is. ~~I don't think~~ - If you have a great personality, it's almost all right; if you have a great success, for one reason or another, it's okay. Peace-keeping, for example, I suppose is the

best public-relations thing we have, because it's visible, it's slightly exotic - all those chaps in blue hats in the middle of the sand or being shot at in south Lebanon or something - it looks good, ~~and it's sort of~~, it's the right thing, it's kind of clean, the vehicles are white, our people are ~~absolutely~~ on the side of right and against the forces of disorder, and so on. But it's not enough.

My regret is that we have never been able to make interesting or fashionable the concept that the world owes itself on the international level institutions comparable to the ones it's built on the national level, in order to survive. We've never managed to get this concept across, at least not in the West, at any rate. And I think that's a terrible failing. I hope your new book is going to take us somewhere in that direction.

GORDENKER: So do I. I think we're going to stop here, at one minute to five.