

# report from the u.n.

**John R. Inman**

The elimination on 15 January 1968 of the position of Director of Public Services of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations raises the grave question of how much value the U.S. State Department places on its role in the U.N. In the past this office has done noteworthy service interpreting U.S. foreign policy as it relates to the United Nations. It has served as a speakers service for forums throughout the country, and it has been an effective disseminator and interpreter of U.S. policy in the U.N. to the countless organized citizen groups that visit the U.N. yearly made up of people earnestly seeking to examine the U.S. role in the world organization. Historically — and I would suggest most important — the Public Service office has been charged with off-the-record briefing of representatives of U.S. nongovernmental organizations which have a special interest in United States U.N. policy. The most recently published list (September 1967) shows 88 organizations accredited to the Mission.

The exchange of views between these N.G.O.s and the State Department dates back to the U.N. Charter conference in San Francisco in 1945. Since then there has been a continuing and valuable relation between the State Department and N.G.O.s on foreign policy matters. Of importance has been the exploration by both government and nongovernment organization representatives of the place of the U.N. in U.S. foreign policy.

The Director of Public Services has played the key role in the exchange between the two groups. With some frequency, the government has called on N.G.O.s to develop support for its policies vis-à-vis the U.N. A general undergirding of public belief in the U.N. and education in other fundamental foreign policy questions has been sustained to a large degree by nongovernmental organizations. One recalls the close relations between the State Department and N.G.O.s on past crucial policy matters: the Marshall Plan, the Bricker Amendment, and the U.N. bond issue. To diminish contact between citizen organizations and the State Department U.N. arms seems to be at best shortsighted.

The reason given for the elimination of the post of Director of Public Services is a budgetary one. State

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Department sources say that the Mission budget has been cut by approximately \$70,000 in line with a general 4½ % slash. None of us is accustomed to seriously considering such small amounts where government expenditures are concerned. So one looks beyond the dollars. Is this an indicator of the worth put on the democratic process of exchange between organized citizen groups and policy makers? Mr. G. Richard Monsen, Senior Advisor for Public Affairs and USIA Representative, has been given the additional task of handling USMUN briefings for N.G.O.s. He has, in other words, been given duties on top of his regular responsibilities which were heavy enough already.

One sympathizes with the Mission's plight in being asked for briefings by so many citizen groups — some important, some trivial. This "through the turnstile" demand on busy personnel is contra-productive. The obvious tool for public briefings is the U.N.A. (United Nations Association of the U.S.A.). Any group unwilling to meet the nominal charges for such briefings does not merit consideration. (The rent does have to be paid after all.)

But what happens to the N.G.O. representatives to the U.N.? The N.G.O. Committee of Inquiry, made up of U.N.-N.G.O. officers and committee chairmen, has a long history of liaison with State, a briefer one with the Mission. The system of submitting in advance of meetings the concerns and questions that the N.G.O.s found to be bothering the public, and then having frank, confidential exchanges with State, was a democratic and mutually valuable process. The elimination of this exercise or its further withering would be a loss not only to State and N.G.O.s but to the U.S. public as well.

The second and broader question is that of Mission briefings for N.G.O.s on U.S. policy in the U.N. If the Mission feels that its overburdened staff cannot carry them on in a serious and less than half-hearted manner, ways should be found to aid the staff. Could not the administrative work connected with briefings, and it is small, be handled by the U.N.A.-U.S.A.? Could not the Mission be responsible for providing a competent briefer and the meeting room? Could not a committee of N.G.O.s advise the Mission on those matters N.G.O.s feel would be particularly timely? Surely one hour in a working year would not overburden even top echelon personnel.

Liaison with State via some device such as the Committee on Inquiry, and a form of meaningful briefings by the Mission are of mutual interest. The diminution or elimination of either would be a disservice to the government, the N.G.O.'s, but even more to a confused U.S. public which has rising doubts about the U.N.