

# U.N. WATCH

## The Fifth Committee

In the flutter over the United States threat to leave UNESCO in 1984, the American contribution of 25 per cent of the agency's budget is getting a good deal of attention. Funding is always a controversial subject at the United Nations; and a major criticism of UNESCO, and of the U.N. itself, is that financial controls are just too loose. Year after year, the largest contributors to U.N. operations make an attempt to keep the budget from swelling to feed a burgeoning bureaucracy.

As a recent U.N. financial report indicates, one problem is that most member-nations treat their contributions and assessments in a very cavalier manner, paying when and what they please.

In 1964, when funds were running out, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly—Administrative and Budgetary—issued a report on members' arrears. Like a posting of accounts payable at a social club, the list had its effect. Then, in December of 1975, with deficits mounting again, the General Assembly recommended that the Fifth Committee publish biannually a document "showing for each member state, amounts assessed, paid and owed to the regular budget and on continuing operations for which there is a special account."

The reports get little publicity in or out of the U.N., and for good reason. Delegates often choose to ignore the arrears of the countries they represent. In some cases these countries, saddled with huge foreign debts in a depressed international economy, simply cannot make payments to the U.N. But among the eighty to ninety members currently in arrears, a pattern of selective payment is apparent: If you don't like what the U.N. is planning, you don't pay.

The USSR did not want the U.N. to intervene in the Congo fighting or in the Suez Canal fracas, so its assessments were not paid; other Eastern bloc nations followed suit. Today, Japan seems to be withholding funds for the U.N. Emergency Force (UNEF) in the Middle East. The United States, of course, often threatens to pull out of this or that agency, wielding its sizable contributions as a weapon.

Independent studies of the United Nations pay little attention to the organization's fragile financial structure. They usually emphasize the contrast between the U.N.'s high ideals and its moderate-to-low achievement or offer ways to strengthen the General Assembly and Security Council. A formidable obstacle to a more detailed and careful study is the multiplicity of U.N. budgets.

The biannual report issued in December, 1983, shows

arrears running into the hundreds of millions of dollars in three contribution categories: Status of Contributions to the United Nations Regular Budget; Annex II on Contributions to the United Nations Emergency Force (1973) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force; and Annex III on Contributions to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

An alphabetical listing of states begins with Afghanistan, which owes \$58,834 of its regular budget contribution for 1983. Albania owes \$94,834, having paid nothing for a few years, but Algeria, Austria, and Australia are in the clear. Brazil is behind more than \$12 million, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic almost \$2 million, and China over \$4 million. Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, and Democratic Yemen are paid up. France is behind \$4,357,157 and the German Democratic Republic over \$3 million, while Greece, Guatemala, and Iceland are current.

Hungary owes \$1.9 million, Iran \$4.6 million, Israel \$2.8 million. The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Pakistan are model contributors, but Libya owes \$1.5 million, Poland \$18 million plus, Rumania \$2 million plus, South Africa \$19 million, and Turkey \$1.6 million. The Ukrainian SSR owes \$5.9 million for 1983, while the USSR, which paid \$61 million last year, is still \$41 million in arrears.

The United States owes \$27,434,157 for 1983—not a large sum in view of the \$147,297,515 already paid. The last seven-digit recalcitrant on the list is Yugoslavia, with \$3.9 million due and \$2.7 million plus already paid for 1983.

As of December 31, 1983, eighty-seven of the U.N.'s 157 member-states owed a grand total of \$170,516,259 for the regular budget.

*Annex II—U.N. Emergency/Observer Forces.* When it comes to the \$55,660,900 awaiting payment in this category, all member-states are equal in that not one has paid in full. The USSR falls almost \$3 million short of its assessment, the U.S. \$5.3 million, and the United Arab Emirates \$27 million plus.

*Annex III—Interim Force in Lebanon.* Everybody has contributed something, but the expense has been staggering and arrears total \$235,916,612!

Selective giving is presumably the privilege of sovereignty, which means that every U.N. member reserves the right to participate in or withhold its monies from actions sanctioned by the majority. This escape hatch is provided by the U.N. Charter.

It is significant that the highest arrears occur in peace-keeping, the U.N.'s most essential function. Articles 39 to 51 of the Charter authorize the use of force against an aggressor by a recruited United Nations army. Key here are the words "peace and security," which U.N. forces are authorized to maintain or, if necessary, reestablish by force. A review of the members' financial response to these peace-keeping efforts indicates that the prospects for the success of such U.N. actions are more remote than ever.

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