The Director-General has said no to proposals made last October by the Association to work out what was described as “new” and “fair” premiums to the health insurance fund that would have lowered payments for many former staff.

But he held the door open, slightly, for a review of rates that the Association had sought by replying, on 23 December, that after the next actuarial study, it may prove necessary to review the contributions payable by all parties. The study is planned for 1994.

In deciding not to “take further action on the proposals at this time,” the Director-General referred frequently to Judgement 1241 of the ILO Administrative Tribunal.

In that appeal, the Association challenged the administrative decision that had been taken in January 1990 to raise premiums by calculating them on a “notional”, and hence imaginary, 30 years of service — irrespective of the actual length of employment. Although that decision resulted in contributions increasing by 600 per cent for some pensioners, the appeal was rejected.

The Association’s request to the D-G last October, however, centered on the inequality of treatment between former and serving staff, its letter pointing out that premiums for former staff are calculated on pre-tax income, while those of serving staff on after-tax income.

Referring to that “as one of the complainant’s arguments put forward to the Tribunal”, the D-G’s letter went on to say that “the Tribunal did not support this argument.” (Full text is being mailed directly to colleagues.)

The issue of premiums championed by the Association has implications for serving colleagues as well. On their separation they too will pay on the basis of the “notional” 30-year service, and, as well, on income before tax.

— Editor

(Re: Before and after tax premiums: former staff who lodged the unsuccessful appeal say in their brief to the Tribunal that “they are not seeking, in the present proceedings, to challenge the legality of the difference.” Thus, the issue of fairness of treatment between former and serving staff has not been ruled upon by the judges, and continues as a violation of the principle of equality, which is an eminently appealable issue. Judgement 1241 was limited only to a challenge of the “notional” premiums.)

**Claim Before 29 November 1994!**

Calling all GS-grades who left WHO between 1 January 1991 and 30 November 1993. There’s some money owing to you — provided you claim, in writing to Personnel, before 29 November 1994.

All thanks to an appeal lodged by André Heitz, long-time staff chairman, on behalf of GS-graded colleagues in WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) and UPOV (Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants), all Geneva GS-grades are eligible for an adjustment, of about 1 per cent monthly, in the salary paid them retroactive to January 1991 — including former staff.

“Judgements 1265 and 1266 of the ILO Tribunal (dated July 1993) have set aside the salary scale implemented earlier by all the Geneva organizations on the basis of the ICSC’s (International Civil Service Commission) recommended scale” according to Information Circular 93/91, which announced the rectification of the Commission’s error.
Invited Author

IN DEFENCE OF RE-EMPLOYMENT

I have the understanding that some Staff Unions and Associations want to block employment of retired staff. But I cannot either as a matter of principle or for practical reasons agree with them. (See “Pillorying the Pensioners,” News, Summer, 1993, and letters that followed, News 15, Autumn.)

A retired person should have the right to take employment wherever and whenever he wants. There should be no obstacle for re-employment in the organization which he has served—except, perhaps in cases of “agreed separation”. For international organizations (in particular WHO) that recruit professional staff at a rather advanced age, using retired staff is in the interest of both the retired and the organisation. International work—particularly in the field—requires long experience both professionally and in an international setting.

A pension is based on compulsory savings throughout active life. The employee-staff member normally agrees to such savings as a trade-in for immediate salary payments. As individuals often act without foresight—particularly when they are young—their pension savings are compulsory and protected until the age of retirement.

The idea that the employer contributes to this savings plan is pure fiction; the trade-in is lower immediate pay. The pension plan is basically an insurance contract. An insurance company will honour the contract however brief the period it has been in force. When pension plans are mixed up with employment conditions, employers tend to take advantage of this, erroneously considering that it is “their money.”

The U.N. pension scheme has a number of features deriving from such erroneous concepts. The five-year “vesting,” or waiting, period is one; another is the withholding of pension payments in cases of re-employment. Note, however, that it is only in the U.N. system that this is applied. And only since a few years ago, when the U.S. system (most unfortunately our guiding example) was revised with the help of the political slogan of “double-dipping”. It is generally acknowledged that the U.S. pension systems are fundamentally outdated and, in addition, disastrously mismanaged by Federal and state employers and by unions and employers.

All periods of employment should be subject to pension payments. Otherwise old-timers will be hired as low-cost employees in competition with younger ones. But this should not mean suspension of their pension during the period of employment.

This, incidentally is an area in which there is natural disagreement between organizations representing active and retired staff respectively. Just to join with the active will not do.

Sven Grabe
(The author is former President of AFFI/AFICS)

CHANGES, CHANGES (MORE)

The following are recent staff appointments:

Emergency and Humanitarian Action • Dr Fabrizio S. Bassani, formerly Deputy Director, Emergency Operations, UNICEF, has been appointed Director, Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action.

Health Education • Dr Desmond J. O’Byrne, Chief, Health Education and Health Promotion, has been designated Acting Director, Division of Health Education (following the retirement of Mr Harwant Singh Dhillon).

Management Development • Mr H.K. Larsen has been appointed Chief of the newly established Management Development Office, reporting to the ADG for Administration. He also serves as Adviser to the Regional Director, EURO; while he is in Copenhagen Dr G. Axmann serves as Acting Chief, Management Development.

Immunization • Dr Henrik B. Zoffmann has been designated Acting Director, Expanded Programme on Immunization, following the appointment of Dr Robert J. Kim-Farley, formerly Director, as WHO Representative, Indonesia.

International Agency for Research on Cancer • Mr Michael Johnson, formerly Administrative Officer has been appointed Director, Division of Administration and Finance.

Regions • Dr Naomi Nhwatiwa, formerly Senior External Relations Officer, UNICEF Nairobi, has been appointed as Director, Programme Promotion, Coordination and Information, AFRO.

• Dr N.K. Shah has been appointed WHO Representative in India, but continues as Director, Prevention and Control of Diseases, SEARO, until further notice.
I saw recently an old patient of mine; considering her 96 years, she was in perfect health. She started chatting about my first visit to her home in the fall of 1950, and gave a surprisingly vivid account of that encounter, with many minute, though pertinent, details. We continued chatting, had a cup of coffee, and then she said: “You remember, Doctor, when you first saw me in autumn 1950; it was a sunny day ...” and told me the same story once again: she did not remember having told it just a few minutes ago.

Of course, this is a perfectly normal, socially acceptable phenomenon for her age. It is less acceptable for my 72 years to meet a well known face from WHO whose name just escaped my memory — well, it will come in a moment, but of course, it does not, and the more I try to remember it, the more embarrassing it becomes. Or is it acceptable? Where are the limits between a normally and a prematurely aging memory?

Understandably, the medical literature cannot give a clear answer, and I do not think it really matters. Aging is as individual a process as life itself, and some people have a better or a worse memory than others. Gerontology teaches that, on the average, cerebral metabolism decreases by age 75 by about 25 per cent as compared to a 20-year-old. There is a decreased availability of acetylcholine and of biogenic amines in the brain, leading to memory impairment; atherosclerosis and drug consumption (e.g. sleeping pills) may also be contributing factors.

However, only half of the loss is attributable to the biological changes described above; the other half is due to psychological changes, such as diminished organizational capacities, decreased attention, slow-down of information processing, and decreased visual imagination. The latter are the important components, because they are amenable to training, which then can lead to an improvement of an impaired memory.

Specialists say that elderly people can learn mnemotechnical methods that will greatly help to retain various types of information; persons who had used mnemotechnics in younger years will have no difficulties in refreshing their capacities, but anybody can acquire such techniques at a mature age, too. Thinking and remembering can be organized and, according to some psycho-geriatricians, the faculty of organized information processing can be refreshed or even newly acquired in old age.

To conclude on a personal note: I, for myself, prefer pursuing some intellectual activities, such as reading and writing (for example, this column), to a memory-refresher course; so, don’t be cross with me if I don’t remember your name next time we meet.

Tom Strasser, MD
(formerly CVD)

(One suggestion: perhaps colleagues should re-introduce themselves, one to the other, automatically, as a matter of course. In the same breath as we ask “how are you?” add also, “I’m John Jones.” —Editor)
Taxes

THAT U.S. TAX EXCLUSION

Here's an item of more than passing interest to colleagues of U.S. nationality living abroad, as carried in Anglo-Phone on the Lakeside, February 1994:

"Have you heard the latest? U.S. citizens may lose their $70,000 tax exclusion. Welcome to the wonderful world of dual taxation. Word has it that lobbyists and some members of Congress are looking to raise money for the U.S. government, and your wallet is right where they're looking. Sounds like it may be time for a letter to your Congressperson — before the change finds its way onto the 1994 tax bill."

THAT "NEW" FRENCH TAX EXPLAINED (?)

Despite its name, URSSAF (Union de Recouvrement des cotisations de Sé curité Sociale et d'Allocations Familiales), the relatively "new" tax that colleagues living in France are subject to, has nothing to do with social security, as its name might suggest.

Put simply, it is a tax enacted in 1990 which gives nothing in return. At that time the law slapped a 1.1 per cent tax on pensions earned abroad, but the rate more than doubled in 1993 to what it is today — 2.4 per cent.

All of this emerges following exchange of correspondence with URSSAF, Bourg en Bresse. Excerpts:

— The query: From a colleague living in France:

"Please find enclosed a cheque for FF 1,521 for quarterly tax (FF 507 monthly) in response to your request, undated, for payment of a supplementary tax on income.

"Like all persons living in France I pay taxes which are entirely justifiable: income, foncier, and habitation. However, I do not understand this tax for social security, which provides no benefits to me; my medical bills being reimbursed by a private insurance with WHO."

— The response: From URSSAF, Bourg:

"I have to inform you that Law No. 90-1166 of 29 December 1990 established a Contribution Sociale Généralisée applicable to earnings (pensions, retirement pay) for all persons fiscally resident in France. In respect of earnings and compensation, URSSAF is considered to be subject to the CSG."

France Voisine

DON'T SHOOT AT THE AMBULANCE!

The international organizations are recruiting fewer and fewer staff. Their budgets are getting smaller, and even the very presence of some agencies in Geneva is in doubt.

In this context, we can only deplore recent attacks that have targeted the international civil servants. The exemptions from taxation which have been long taken for granted and which, except in the case of CERN employees, are now being challenged have always existed. Following studies made by some French Treasury officials, only certain international civil servants will benefit from these exemptions while others will not. How can anyone think of rescinding a situation that has been valid for over 40 years?

It's both ridiculous and provocative. It's also ridiculous and malicious for those who are not tax-exempted to express their glee at seeing everybody "in the same boat."

If these inappropriate measures should be introduced, nobody will gain by it. You don't shoot at the ambulance! That's why you will never catch me taking the side of those people who claim they want to see equal treatment for all. The misfortunes of the international civil servants will not bring us any joy.

Many of them decided a long time ago to settle in the frontier zone precisely because of a certain number of advantages that nobody ever wanted to deprive them of. If their status here should ever be put in doubt, their very presence here would also be put in doubt — and what good would that do for the rest of us?

Pascal Maylan,
Mayor of Ferney-Voltaire

(From Ferney, que j'aime, Dec 1993, Jan-Feb 1994.)

U Thant Village

NARBONNE, SOUTH OF FRANCE

A French-based staff group in France is developing a retirement complex for U.N. people of all ages from all over the world, according to Secretariat News (Nov. 1993).

Manuela D'Arcy, formerly with Protocol in New York, said that the site is in Narbonne, a wine-growing region about 30-minutes drive from Mont-
pellier. It is called “U Thant Village” in honour of the late Secretary-General. She is the responsible official of the Association méditerranéenne du personnel des Nations Unies, a non-profit organization.

Construction of some 250-300 villas is planned for autumn, to be followed by a condominium complex and a centre comprising conference and recreational facilities. The property, which runs to the Mediterranean, has a 50-berth marina which will be expanded to accommodate 200 boats.

**UPDATE**

The response of international civil servants to the idea of U Thant Village has been good, but there are problems of financing still to be resolved, so says Manuela d’Arty, responsible official in Paris.

In a letter to enquirers up-dating developments she advises: “The enthusiasm you have shown in your very numerous correspondence made our President, the French Ambassador, Paul-Marc Henry, and myself most happy. We knew that such a concept would have a positive ring amongst international civil servants. You confirmed it.”

Her non-profit Association, created in December 1992, supports the work of an enterprise which is developing villages on the Mediterranean shore. Under Malek Basbous, a Lebanese, it is raising funds for the project, signing a protocol with financiers in London last September.

**LIFESTYLES**

**ANYTHING BUT ‘RETIRED’**

Paul Lawton (formerly COR) has been awarded the 1992-93 European Poetry Translation Prize by the Poetry Society in London for his translation of “Summer Is Not All” by the Italian poet and polemician Franco Fortini, published by the Carcanet Press. He now lives in Paris and among current projects is a translation of “The Canti” of Leopardi; and a novel based on life in the international organizations.

**STILL SERVING BEYOND 60**

Dr Sang Tae Han (Republic of Korea) has been appointed for a second five-year term as Regional Director for WPRO beginning 17 February. A press release said he is married, has three children and three grandchildren, and that he was born in Seoul in 1928.

**ADVICE AND SUPPORT**

Here is the list of colleagues who have volunteered their advice and support in the newly-established Self-Help Group network:

- **General Advice.**
  - Margaret Baker (formerly PER) 023 50 36 88 63;
  - Yves Beigbeder (PER) 023 50 71 92 72, FAX: 023 50 71 26 00;
  - Rosemary Bell (IMM) 50 42 26 78; Joan Robertson (VBC) 732 39 24.

- **Visits/Shopping Advice.**
  - J. Bernard-Kirukhine (MAL) 344 13 84;
  - Inayat Khan 78 08 10 (psychotropic drugs).

- **Car/Home Maintenance Advice.**
  - A.L. Malakoff (PER) 794 51 03.

- **Medical Advice.**
  - Drs N.T. Racoveanu (RAD) 344 16 75;
  - T. Strasser, (CVD) 734 00 71 (recorder for messages).

- **Emergency Advice/Advice to Colleagues Outside Geneva.**
  - Margit Hilsenrad (HST) 347 90 38.

According to Rosemary Bell, one of the founders, the Self-Help Group is “flourishing”. Those interested meet on the first Friday of each month at 11 a.m. at the Hotel Savoy, just opposite Cornavin station. “All colleagues are welcome, particularly those on a visit to Geneva,” she says. “Fit us in your schedule.”

**FIELD TRIP**

Thanks to the organizing ability of Carlo Fedele, a member of the committee, colleagues lunched (Pailarde de veau avec légumes, salade mêlée, tarte aux pommes, café) at the Hotel Vieux-Stand, Martigny on 11 November, then visited the Degas exhibit at the Musée Gianadda, in another successful and much appreciated field trip.
I went on a three week mission to Croatia last November for the International Organization for Migration — an intergovernmental but not U.N. organization whose headquarters are in the red-windowed, bright angular buildings located on the same hill as WHO a little beyond JLO. The object was simple but not easy; to set up a public information programme for JOM who do a heroic but little-known job of taking people to safety, reuniting families and evacuating medical cases that cannot be adequately treated on the spot. Most of the victims are either Bosnians or Croatians torn from their homes by violence.

There is a tremendous cooperative effort in place involving UNPROFOR (U.N. Protection Force) that tries to protect civilian populations, and UNHCR and JOM whose specialty is moving those in danger to safe places, for instance in evacuating civilians stranded by the Gulf War or in aiding boat people.

JOM occupies two floors in an apartment building set back in a courtyard off a busy Zagreb street. Traffic is continuous and intense in this city of about a million people in spite of the war that is only an hour or so drive away. People try to get on with their lives as best they can.

Journalists are busy people, particularly when they cover the mini-wars flaring up in so many places. Those of us who work for organizations like the JOM or WHO have to try to interest them in the less significant but nonetheless equally compelling human interest stories of the displaced and dispossessed.

J accompanied a group of eleven young wounded men, mostly teenagers, to an airfield from which they were evacuated by an Air Force plane, first to Germany and then to hospitals in the U.S. The sort of care they required was not available in the medical installations to which they had been taken for first treatment. Many of these young people had wanted to travel but this was not how they had visualized their first visit to far away places.

In Split J organized the filming of a family reunification. Under this JOM programme, those with families in safe countries are able to reunite. At least half the number leaving were children, one was a young pregnant woman. Those who are young will find the change least troubling, but for the adults who have lost homes, professions and even their language, new lives will present every hardship. The threat of death and mutilation however are left behind.

As a person forced “to leave the organization because of the rules”, as my former WHO “roommate” in public information likes to put it, there was tremendous satisfaction in being able to use talents developed over the years. And even better, when you really need the energy and drive to do a job you know is worthwhile, it is here.

Nedd Willard
(Formerly Information Officer, SEARO, & HQ Geneva)
LETTERS

A TRIBUTE

Jimmy W. Wright, who passed away on 9 December 1993, had a distinguished career, retiring as Director of the Division of Vector Biology and Control. He was responsible for the planning and implementation of WHO’s programme of research into insecticides, genetics of vectors and biological control. He was Secretary of the WHO Expert Committee on Insecticides and author of a number of scientific publications on vector control.

He will be long remembered for his many virtues by his friends and colleagues, among them myself who was privileged to serve under his leadership.

Rajindar Pal
(formerly VBC)

A FRUSTRATING REUNION

I am truly sorry to have to level some criticism at the well-meaning organisers of our reunion of 2 December 1993 who had contributed their time and effort in trying to please us.

I am also sorry as regards our singing and playing colleagues who sought to entertain us. But the organisers seem to have lost sight of the purpose of a reunion of former WHO staff.

We didn’t come either for sermons or entertainment. My wife and I just wanted to pass an hour or two, on a pleasant and special occasion, saying hello again to our young, and not so young, former colleagues and their wives, having a friendly chat with them, mulling over old times and some of the common memories we have shared, and swapping experiences as retired staff.

All this after a few words — but only a few words — of welcome from the Chairman of the Association and from the D.G. or his representative, over a glass of wine and some nibbles, against a background of soft music.

We must have been dreaming! Around a buffet offering the sparest of emergency rations, we were poleaxed by an interminable and boring series of speeches and statements.

The sound-system was far too loud and made it hard to hear either the speeches or the songs and music. The net result was that, after shaking a lot of hands and exchanging an occasional few words, we promptly left, deafened, frustrated and disappointed that this reunion had completely lost its sense of direction!

Daniel Flahault
(formerly Ombudsman)

(The Association’s Executive Group, in reviewing reactions to the arrangements made, concluded that:
— The musical entertainment and lively conversation of colleagues proved incompatible. Apologies were made to Pro Musica. From now on concerts will be held separately.
— Addresses will be limited to the Chairman, and the D-G.
— The hot part of the altogether excellent food will be served early.

— Executive Group)

CERTAIN OMISSIONS

Re “On Blood and Iron” by Tom Strasser” (News 15, Autumn 1993)

I think the following points should have been included:

• Nutritional deficiency is an important cause of iron deficiency anaemia in the elderly, particularly those who live alone. The importance of diet should therefore be emphasized. The best source of iron is animal food, because the iron in vegetables is less readily absorbed. The inclusion of ascorbic acid (e.g., from orange juice) enhances iron absorption and is, therefore, particularly useful in people on vegetarian diets.

• The columnist points out that the cause of iron deficiency anaemia must be investigated. I would add that it is always important to correct the underlying cause. Although this seems obvious, it is often overlooked.
Cancer of the gastrointestinal tract is omitted as a cause of iron deficiency anaemia. There have been enough cases of inoperable cancer of the colon, for example, becoming obvious only after months or even years of iron therapy to make its mention mandatory.

Finally, a word about blood transfusions for actual blood loss. In most cases replacing the volume of blood lost with saline or colloid solutions is the over-riding consideration. Blood transfusion should be given only when absolutely necessary, based on the features in the patient being treated, even in developed countries where it is now safer than ever.

But the risk is still relatively high in some areas of some developing countries, and this is by no means confined to transmission of HIV infection.

W.N. Gibbs, M.D.
Chief, LBS
(Health Laboratory Technology & Blood Safety)

EXCEPTIONS, DISCOUNTS
Re: The two items on health insurance (News 15, Autumn 1993)

Firstly, there has been no change in policy with regard to reimbursement of aspirins, vitamins or other medicaments considered as "hors liste" by Swiss health insurances or as non-reimbursable by certain social security schemes. In general, they are not reimbursed, unless prescribed to treat a specific medical condition where an exception is made.

Secondly, Laboratoire Monnier et Spoerri SA offered a 20 per cent discount from the beginning and this was stated in Information Circular (No. IC/93/46) — 10 per cent under the contractual arrangement and an additional 10 per cent for prompt payment within 30 days.

Ann Van Hulle-Colbert
Secretary, Headquarters Surveillance Committee

IN THE PRESS

BOSSES SPEAK WELL OF OLDER WORKERS

Productive activity is good for health at any age. We all need a role in society but as the value of older workers is rarely understood, their potential contribution is lost.

As the world's population ages, more people are likely to want to work in late life. What is more, the ILO and the OECD predict a shortage of workers after the year 2010. So older workers may become a valued resource.

As part of a study into healthy aging for WHO, I examined the policies and experience of ten firms. The following is one example:

- In 1988, TESCO, the second largest supermarket chain in the UK, adopted a "Mature Entrant Programme" for staff recruitment and retention. The company employs more than 7 000 staff aged 55 plus in a wide range of jobs. It agreed that I interview eighty older workers and fifty supervisors.

Of the 50 managers interviewed:
- 40 said the older workers were better with customers.
- 40 said they were more reliable.
- 39 said they were more responsible
- 37 said they were less likely to be absent
- 28 said that they were more efficient, and
- 27 that older workers were less likely to be off sick, compared with younger workers.

On issues of productivity, relations with other staff, accidents, ability to learn, and willingness to try something new, the majority of managers rated the older and younger workers equally.

Many commented that while the older workers may be slower than the younger ones, the greater reliability, responsibility and efficiency meant they were just as productive.

The overall impression from the study was that, on the one hand, the company had a positive impact on the health and well-being of its older workers; on the other hand the older workers contributed in a significant way to its successful operations and image.

Ann Kern
formerly Director IEH
Excerpted from the Courrier, April 1993

Acknowledgements: The Executive Group thanks those who have made possible this issue, especially Peter Ozorio (Editor), Rajindar Pal, the translators; also Marianne King. Layout by Humphrey Matthey, Geneva.
SOMETHING NEW AT THE YEAR-END RECEPTION

Some 200 persons attended the 7th Annual Reception of the Association last December — an affair with a difference. In addition to bringing former staff together, it was also billed as an occasion to strengthen bonds of friendship between former and serving colleagues.

For the first time, there was a door prize, two tickets to London, courtesy of Wagon Lits and British Airways, arranged through the charm of Dr Rajindar Pal, the Association’s vice-chairman. The lucky winner: Ray Blattler, formerly of payroll.

The Director-General sent regrets at being called away, as well as two substitutes, both of ADG rank, to convey greetings: Dr Hu Ching Li, and Denis Aitken, the ADG for Administration. That was another first. Dr Jan Stjernsward, chairman of the 41st Staff Committee, also said a few words, his first address at the annual reception.

There were refreshments, of course, but, most of all, food for talk. The reaction to the innovative evening? Some thought the music interfered with the talk (see Letters); others that the talk intruded upon the music. Chairman of the Association, Dr Stanislas Flache, in a note of thanks to the performers said:

“You performed well and gracefully, under fire as it were, and certainly to the appreciation of those close enough to the podium to hear. If it is any consolation, may I say that I understand Mozart played under similar, trying conditions.”

(Photos: courtesy of Jean Germain (formerly IEH), Ted Wiseman APS.)

Classic: Richard Harrison, PUB; Anouk Mercier (daughter of staffer); Pascal Le Quéré, HLE, (piano).

The AIDS Song : Aaron Andrade (piano) Nadine Ferris (voice).

Modern music: Philip Munger, SHP. Blues, Folk Songs: John Wickett, GPA.

Christmas Carols: Lorna Wietska, APS, (voice); Cecilia Schneider.

News, Association of Former WHO Staff