Comment

There is no universal answer to the question of income tax on U.N. pensions. If all U.N.-member countries taxed, then the issue would disappear, but the fact of the matter is that some countries tax pensions partly while others exempt them entirely. Not many, admittedly, but enough to set precedent.

Based on information from former and serving staff, this much is known: Britain exempts 10 per cent of pension from tax on grounds that it originates from a fund established overseas. The “Republic and Canton of Geneva” and the United States exempt that part of pension financed by the pensioner — provided there is no lump sum settlement.

Reportedly pensioners residing in Austria, India, Paraguay, Philippines, and Spain are entirely exempt from tax. With the exception of Paraguay, all these countries have something in common — they are host to a major U.N. agency. Which may be an explanation.

It cannot be disputed that the benefits accruing to a country’s economy from a U.N. presence more than justifies the waving of tax on salaries and, by extension, on pensions. After all, we represent a minority, and so there is no economic “loss” to speak about to the country.

Certainly tax-free pensions were among the incentives offered by the Austrians that led the United Nations to Vienna, which is now headquarters for the International Atomic Energy Agency, and other agencies as well.

The Taxing Problem of Pension

Just three months ago, in attempting to lure the World Trade Organization, successor of GATT, from Geneva to Bonn, Germany offered incentives that, according to press reports, included tax-free pensions.

In the end, Geneva beat Bonn out, with a package combining buildings, parking, as well as concessions to WTO staff described in the letter to the Tribune de Genève excerpted on page 10 of News.

“L’offre de Bonn ... était bonne. Mais la notre était excellente,” exulted William Rossier, the Swiss Ambassador to GATT after it was all over. That may be, but what the Swiss offer has done is to create, willy-nilly, entitlements for a group of internationals that are not accorded others, with the consequences that are sure to come.

All of which shows that attitudes have changed towards internationals in Geneva — from indifference about a decade ago to more than interest today. They want us. Like us or not, our presence in the area means jobs for local folk.

According to the Geneva Statistical Office, the international community pumped $2 billion into the local economy in 1993, a fact surely not lost to authorities in times of recession; and which constitutes as strong a rebuttal as any to those who resent the privileges and immunities conferred upon internationals.

“When it is said that the tax-free status of U.N. officials is not popular, the see page 2
"I WENT back to the CLASSROOM"

Before joining WHO in April 1970, I was a professor in pharmacology and therapeutics. While working for WHO was rewarding, I missed my students. In 1990, after separation, I seized the opportunity to spend a month surveying pharmaceutical education in Pakistan through visits to the seven schools of pharmacy, and another month visiting nine medical schools in the provinces of Sindh and Baluchestan.

On these occasions, I gave talks to students, speaking about WHO’s programme to promote the rational use of pharmaceuticals and to prevent drug abuse. Indeed, this has been the pattern over recent years in visits to medical schools — whether in Aden, Amman, Beirut, Chicago, Sana’a or elsewhere — a lecture or two on the proper use of pharmaceuticals, followed by a discussion. Students appreciated the information on WHO. I felt of service to them and also to WHO, spreading knowledge of its work.

Talks and lectures are one thing, fairly easy to manage, but teaching again...? Baqai University in Karachi, established in 1986, is a private medical institution, the first in Pakistan, with schools of medicine, dentistry, nursing and a faculty of public health offering an MPH degree. I was invited to teach for a term. I was challenged and then nervous since it had been 26 years when I had last taught regular courses.

Prof. Zakari Hassan, the Vice Chancellor, gave me psychological support, and eventually my confidence came back and the years and fears since I last taught vanished. It was as though I never left my students, the black-board and the classroom.

Each of the two courses I taught were attended by some 120 students, 80 per cent of whom were women. There was no pay, but my expenses were covered, and the satisfaction was tremendous.

A word of thanks to my serving colleagues in PUB who were generous in supplying me with WHO material to serve as texts and which were seen for the first time by many students. I would like to think that sales may be helped eventually.

The word may have gone around now in countries I know well, judging from other offers to repeat what I did at Baqai University. I feel that I have to choose carefully to lead a partially retired life and to keep my family happy.

You don’t have to be a medical doctor or a pharmacist, I assure you. Every former colleague has information to offer to students, and in their way become a good will ambassador of WHO.

— Inayat Khan, Ph.D.
(former chief, psychotropic, narcotic drugs)

from page 1 “Comment”

comparison with the European Community should be kept in mind,” former U.N. staffer Knud Lassen wrote in a letter (Autumn 1993, News, No. 15).

In addition to being better than U.N. pensions, he pointed out, EEC pensions are tax-free in all EEC countries, which is a fact deserving to be made better known.

In India, as an item on page 4 shows, (“Tax Exempt in India”) the High Court of Karnataka ruled that as salary has been defined to include pension, then, in much the same way as salary is free of tax under the host agreement covering privileges and immunities, pension too must be exempt. That is a compelling argument.

All of which shows that while there is no universal answer to the issue of taxing pensions, there are individual solutions. There seems no better place than Geneva, and no better time than the present, than to argue locally for the Indian interpretation.

— Peter Ozorio, Editor

NEW FAX FOR FIN/PER

Mrs Renate Wiedmer, Chief of the WHO Pension and Insurance Unit (FIN / PEN) has advised of a change in fax number. It is: 41 22 791 41 84 (Geneva).
"I WENT TO VIET NAM"

Zealous militias brandishing submachine guns, rent-a-crowd demonstrators chanting slogans, banners hung across the streets, surly bureaucrats resenting capitalist visitors, strict security checks; if that's how you imagine Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital — forget it!

The country may not be ready for jumbo-loads of tourists but it has many attractions, and none of the crude dogma that used to be the hallmark of East bloc nations. The WHO-organised International Conference on the Elimination of Leprosy, held from 4 to 7 July this year, took place in the country's Parliament. As one Vice-Chairman reminded us, that was like being invited to meet in the Palace of Westminster in London or in Washington's Capitol. Yet there was simply no security.

My own role was as a public information consultant to WHO's Leprosy unit — now upgraded to a Special Programme — but, in common with all the other participants, I came and went at will, sometimes carrying slideshow projection and filming material, through the great front portals or via a courtyard at the rear.

As for the bureaucrats, to judge by the Vietnamese organisers, they are invariably smiling, helpful, efficient and — as regards the ladies, madly pretty. True, a vast bust of Ho Chi Minh loomed over the main auditorium — where we sat at desks bearing MPs' nameplates (and wondered why 90 per cent of Vietnamese seem to be called Nguyen). Nearby there were daily queues to view the great man's embalmed body, while half a mile down Dien Bien Phu Street boys cheerfully booted a football against a statue of Lenin.

"Privatisation" and the free market have ensured that foreign visitors need not bother with the local currency; I know — I tried to use it. But since it takes 10,000 dong to make one U.S. dollar, and since even a couple of noughts in Italian lire invariably confuse me, I speedily reverted to spending the currency that all shopkeepers and taxi-drivers use, namely the dollar.

It is still a very poor country; builders work at a leisurely pace, climbing on rickety bamboo scaffolding and hoisting buckets of cement on a rope. But there is a feeling of animation and confidence which must surely enable this agreeable country to pull itself up by its bootstraps. Inevitably Hanoi looks over its shoulder at Ho Chi Minh Ville (Saigon), which is a decade or two ahead in infrastructure. But it has many charms itself. Yes, the pavements are cracked and pot-holed, and no building appears to have had a lick of paint for the past 50 years. But there are many fine houses fronting the tree-lined avenues, and at night the streets throb with vitality, as children play, people squat on the sidewalks to eat “fast foods,” and the brightly lit silks and ceramics shops do a booming trade. There are bargains to be had; a colleague emerged from one of these little boutiques with a trophy: a Vietnamese military helmet, complete with red star. Price: one dollar.

As for the cuisine, it is delicious, and cheap. Even in the smart tourist hotels you may pay only $7 for a three-course dinner with a beer and coffee. Two rival restaurants within one block of each other are called The Piano and The Old Piano. One is rather down market, but the elderly lady pianist and her violinist colleague will cheerfully try to play a cha-cha on demand. In the other, the piano, though no Steinway, is slightly better tuned, and the young pianist gave a commendable rendering of Beethoven’s Appassionata Sonata.

The conference ended by acclaiming the Hanoi Declaration, pledging all endemic countries, donors and NGOs to reduce leprosy to below one case per 10,000 population by the year 2000. We could not have imagined a better setting for such a historic commitment.

—John Bland
(former Editor-in-Chief, World Health)

SPECIAL OFFER

American Express is offering exclusively to WHO serving and former staff their Inter national Dollar Card at a special annual fee of US$ 25, instead of US$ 100.-.

Application forms are available in the Association’s office E 118.

GRANDPARENTS’ DAY

Not to be forgotten, 11 September is that day, at least in the United States.

It recognizes the growing number of grandparents in the country that first gave the world Mother’s Day and then Father’s Day.

ALZHEIMER DAY

WHO and the Alzheimer Association have declared 21 September as World Alzheimer Day, according to Le Figaro.

More than 15 million are afflicted by this disease worldwide.
Pensions

The '92 Report

These tidbits from the 1992 report of the U.N. Joint Staff Pension Fund, as summarized by PK Bansal, SEARO:

- That assets totalled more than US$ 10.2 billion on 31 December 1992 as compared to $9.3 billion a year earlier.
- That investments in bonds, real estate and securities did well, yielding $886,994,230.
- That participants increased from 60,183 to 61,968. During the year, 3,635 lump-sum withdrawal and other settlements were paid.
- That the market value of assets on 31 March 1993 was $11,407 million, $1,296 million more than a year earlier. The total yearly return was 11.6 per cent which, after adjustment by the U.S. consumer price index, represented a "real" rate of 8.2 per cent.

This was the eleventh consecutive year in which the Fund achieved a positive return. (Returns over the past five years, beginning in 1989, were 5.9 per cent, 11.6 per cent, 8.9 per cent, 7.6 percent and 11.6 per cent respectively).

- That administrative costs totalled $6,813,822 as compared to $6,995,690 in 1991. Data processing costs increased to $2,532,148 from $1,756,856 in 1991. No expenditure was incurred on office furnishings in 1992, as compared to $1,043,490 in 1991.

- That the cost of investment services escalated from $10 million to more than $11.1 million in 1992.

- That staff costs increased to $316,315 from $294,239.

(Excerpted from SEARO News, 7 June 1994)

Relief for Russians

Russia's President Boris Yeltsin has been asked by FICSA to help in "restoring in the U.N. pension fund" all of the Russians who retired between 1981 and 1990.

"As a result of internal regulations in force during that period," FICSA's president, Judy Lavnick-Wainstein, said in a letter last May, this group of retirees had no "other choice but to reluctantly request" that their pensions be paid directly to the USSR government.

This procedure is "contrary to the U.N. Charter and the principles governing the international civil service," the letter went on to say, adding: "The U.N. pension fund has shown its willingness to restore their pension rights, if you cooperate with them to this end."

Earlier ILO's staff union said it would make monthly grants of $30 for over two years to four former colleagues who were receiving pensions in rubles equivalent to less than $20 a month from the USSR. In addition, it established a Russian Pension Solidarity Fund.

Tax Exempt in India

As a result of a decision by the Karnataka High Court, pensioners in India are exempt from paying income tax, Link, the newsletter of UNICEF's pensioners, recently reassured readers. The case, brought by K. Ramaiah, a former staff member, was based on the U.N. Privileges and Immunities Act, 1947, which exempts salaries from tax.

According to a circular (No. 293), dated February 1981, put out by the country's Central Board of Direct Taxes, the court held that since "salary has been defined to include pension, if salary is exempted from tax, so shall be the pension."

Thus to subject U.N. staff to tax, "the government may have to amend the U.N. Immunities Act," the pensioners' newsletter said, adding "which is not likely."

Now an Airport Tax

Effective 1 July 1994, a new Swiss airport tax has been levied for international flights, varying upon the port of departure.

From Geneva, it is CHF 13, plus a summer surcharge of CHF 1.50, according to WHO's TAT (Travel & Transportation) Travel Advisory.

Donations

Treasurer Joseph Chang-Wailing reports the receipt of CHF 850 in donations during 1993 from three colleagues.

It's very much appreciated he says, and, dropping a not-too-subtle hint, adds that more would be welcome.
THINK ABOUT INFLUENZA NOW

I am jotting down these lines sitting comfortably on the balcony in a most pleasant August sunshine, but at the time this appears, Geneva may be shivering in autumnal rains. There are therefore good reasons for thinking ahead and writing about influenza now.

By the way, thinking ahead is what WHO does for all of us by monitoring the movements of influenza viruses all over the globe. Viruses in plural, because of the many strains, sometimes new ones, requiring the production of ever newer vaccines, based on epidemiological assessments in a worldwide network of collaborating laboratories.

The epidemics of influenza move with the seasons back and forth between the northern and southern hemisphere. The Chinese winter affords a good opportunity to make predictions for the South African winter, to come half a year later, as does a South American epidemic, say in July, allow WHO to predict which virus strains will be prevalent in "our" European winter. In this way, WHO can make recommendations for the composition of the vaccines to be produced in advance for use in the forthcoming influenza season.

As far as we, former staff, are concerned, emphasis is on the word "use." Whether we like it or not, clinicians consider those of us over 65 as high-risk persons, who need protection against the virus. Influenza still may be a deadly disease, like the grippe that came to France from Italy in 1743, and therefore (according to the Larousse étymologique) was given this Italian name by Mme d'Epinay in 1743; or like the "Spanish flue" in 1918–19 — which, by the way, had little to do with Spain, having first been reported in France and the United States.

Of course, complications such as pneumonia are nowadays treated routinely and thus the danger is less than in, medically speaking, historical times. There is no absolute certainty that the 1994 vaccine will indeed immunize against the 1994-95 epidemic; but it is highly probable that it will. So, why not take the shot? Side effects are improbable, it is inexpensive, and does not hurt. Just contact your doctor (if you have one), and be a good WHO alumnus, putting prevention into practice.

—Tom Strasser, MD
(formerly CVD)

Health Insurance

PENSIONERS' PLIGHT

For the first time ever, the annual report of the health insurance plan shows premiums paid per former staff member amounting to $1,470 as against reimbursements of $1,308, thus negating claims that pensioners are responsible for any deficit.

It is regrettable, however, that this should be due to the arbitrary decision taken in 1989 to increase premiums — which has caused hardship to many pensioners — in disregard of the principle of solidarity and to the disadvantage even of serving staff.

It is to be hoped that the next actuarial study will be more realistic than the last to enable some of the mistakes made at that time to be corrected.

— Alain Vessereau
(Member Executive Group and representative to the health surveillance committee)

IAEA

OVER IN THE VIENNA WOODS

In my case there were four instances where Van Breda (the insurance company covering IAEA, Vienna) incorrectly refused, either partially or in total, reimbursement of medical expenses:

- They applied a limit to the reimbursement of the cost of a medically prescribed contact lens though the limit applies only to spectacle lenses.

- They refused reimbursement of the cost of a prescribed medicine on the grounds that it could also be bought in supermarkets without prescription. The insurance contract simply stipulates that the cost of a medicine is to be reimbursed provided it is prescribed by a medical doctor — that's all.

- They refused reimbursement of the cost of a medically prescribed contact lens because the strength of the lens had not changed from an earlier prescription. That limitation, however, is only
France Voisine

**THAT TERM: THE 3rd AGE**

Certain words, in common usage, no longer have the meaning they used to have a few years ago. When the Club du 3ème âge de Ferney-Voltaire was founded more than 20 years ago, the expression “3rd Age” was applied to elderly people who had reached retirement (65 years at that time).

But now few people in their sixties, or even in their seventies, are willing to regard themselves as belonging to the “3rd Age.” Like the poet, they no doubt think:

The term that puts me in a rage
Is that wearisome buzzword “3rd Age.”
It suggests babies’ noise
Nappies, dummies and toys,
And a return to the infancy stage.

Ought we not change our name to avoid having “3rd Age” understood in a pejorative sense, and instead find a name that more accurately expresses what we are today — pensioners who intend to stay young for many years? A fair number of clubs have done so, why not ours?

—Jacques Bacaly
Ferney-Voltaire
(Excerpted from the bulletin of the Club 3ème âge de Ferney-Voltaire)

(In Canada the preferred phrase is “senior citizen.” — Editor)

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**FRENCH OR FOE**

For those relocating to France a new and valuable piece of research has just been published. “French or Foe” by Polly Platt, an American living in Paris, offers a lively and informative guide to the customs and culture of the French from an Anglophone perspective.

Topics covered include the small things, such as different conceptions of body space and the sport of queue-jumping, as well as more serious business matters such as time-keeping and the idea of what a business meeting is meant to achieve.

Written with considerable sympathy for France and the French, the consistent argument is that understanding is the key to diffusing foreigners’ frustrations. It is published by Culture Crossings Ltd. (telephone, London (44-71) 404-2161; fax (44-71) 831-2261.)

(Excerpted from the Int’l Herald Tribune 2-3 July ‘94)

—Polly Platt
American living in Paris
(Excerpted from French or Foe)

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**from page 5 IAEA**

valid for spectacle lenses.

- I was to be hospitalized for 24 hours for an eye operation. However, because all went smoothly I was discharged on the same day. When I submitted a claim for 90 per cent reimbursement, I was told that a single-day hospitalization was no hospitalization at all and that I should have submitted my claim under the category “Doctors’ fees,” reimbursable at 80 per cent.

I found this business particularly silly since, had I stayed for 24 yours as originally planned, I would have had to pay for two days and the burden on the insurance would have been twice as high.

On all occasions I won but only because as a former staff member of the Division of Personnel I remembered some of the clauses of the contract. Others, whether active or retired, are likely to never have seen the actual text of the contract and so are at a serious disadvantage.

—Herbert Vetter
(formerly personnel, International Agency for Atomic Energy; Excerpted from Echo, 185, Spring 1994)
CHANGES, CHANGES... (MORE)

The following are recent staff appointments:

**Environmental Health**: Dr T. Kjellström has been appointed as Director of the Office of Global and Integrated Environmental Health; and Mr G. Ozolins as Director of the Division of Operational Support in Environmental Health.

**Tropical Diseases**: Dr P.J.A. Ranque, formerly Senior Medical Officer in the Office of Director, Control of Tropical Diseases, has been appointed as Chief of the newly-established unit of Dracunculiasis Eradication in the Division of Control of Tropical Diseases.

**Vaccines and Immunization**: Dr P-H. Lambert has been appointed as Chief, Vaccine Research and Development; Dr H. Zoffmann has been appointed as Chief, Expanded Programme on Immunization. Mr P. Evans has been designated Acting Chief, Vaccine Supply and Quality.

(Unless stated to the contrary by correspondents, letters received are routinely considered, and edited, for publication to encourage an exchange of views among colleagues. — Editor)

**GENEROSITY, KINDNESS**

Olga Boleman, interpreter, retired from WHO a little more than five years ago. She then moved away from the world of interpretation to which she had belonged for nearly forty years, working originally under her maiden name, de Pojidaeff. Previously, she had obtained various diplomas at the University of Paris and not all of them were necessarily in languages, a fact she never mentioned.

Feeling a little tired and not wishing to continue in the profession, and having suffered a number of blows to her health, she adopted a new pace in life in the company of her mother and her husband, Tibor. He respected her, held her in high esteem and lavished every attention upon her.

Her colleagues and friends were always asking after her. God knows if Olga was constantly getting herself — and us — into the most unlikely predicaments! But Olga's behaviour reflected her generosity, kindness, feeling for others, frankness and, let us not forget, her love of animals. She inspired the same qualities in those she encountered. That is why everyone felt such warmth for her.

Her two loved ones passed away within a short space of time and Olga left us at the end of June. She has left us...but remains in our thoughts.

— Maurice Howard
*CRC / CCP*

**EARLY DAYS**

Re: *A Tribute* (News, 16 Winter 1993-94)

Jimmy Wright was a wonderful example of how, in the early days of WHO, recognition was given to personal dedication and effort, particularly in the field, and not to "geographical distribution" and nationality.

We must never in our grief mourn that Jimmy is no longer, but rather give thanks that he was. Those who knew him will always be grateful that he was, and inspired and affected our lives for the better.

With all good wishes for the continuing dedicated work you all do for us.

—Bill Barton
*Exmouth, Devon*
(former Chief, staff development, training)

**ECONOMICAL PROSE**


I still remember vividly my first contact with Dr James Deeney at the Regional Directors Meeting with WRs (my first as a minute-writer) in the early 1960s.
He was forthright in his denunciation of SEARO's loquacious telegrams (those were the days when all messages were sent by commercial channels — telex machines were not yet in vogue and travel from Delhi to Djakarta took about two days, with halts in Calcutta and Singapore). He and Dr L.W. Fitzmaurice (then WR Thailand) were able to extract an assurance from the R-D that SEARO would be economical in its telegrams and their contents.

He fought for all project proposals, put up persuasive and convincing arguments, and succeeded in getting what he wanted for Indonesia! That was the Dr Deeny I knew.

— J.V. Perumal
SEARO
(Excerpted from SEARO News 7 June 1994)

MEMORIES

Re: In Tribute (News, No. 17 Spring)

Although it is sad to learn of the deaths of four former colleagues, with whom I had close association, it is good to be kept informed of these events — as well as of many happier ones — and the tributes you publish not only bring back memories but can also be of comfort to family and friends mourning the loss of loved ones.

— Aubrey M. Woolman
Eastbourne, England

A TRIBUTE

Re: In Tribute (News, 17 Spring 1994)

Our friend Charles Lederrey who died recently was a great connoisseur of nature. He was on the commission for summer outings of the International Ski Club of Geneva, was its second president and competently led many of the day trips.

— Paul Blanc
Lutry, Vaud

BROAD SPECTRUM

Re: (News, 17, Spring 1994)

Congratulations on a publication that is as 'broad spectrum' as any of its genre.

— E.C. Engrard
Cornwall, England

SHAKESPEARE'S AGES

Re: That Term: The "3rd Age" (see p. 6)

Another Jacques, a cynical exile in Shakespeare's As You Like It, listed no fewer than Seven Ages of Man, starting with "the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms" and "the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school."

Passing through the lover "sighing like furnace," the soldier "full of strange oaths and bearded like the 'purd" and the lawyer "in fair round belly with capon lined," Jacques comes to the Sixth — "the lean and slippered pantaloon, with spectacles on nose" — wherein perhaps we, pensioners, may well see ourselves.

But certainly not — and here all will agree with Jacques Bcaley — certainly not as belonging to the Seventh Age of Man: "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything!"

— John Bland
Mourex, France
(former Editor, WH)
It has been our consistent practice to reply to all queries raised which have not already been dealt with.

I would also like to say a word about the level of WHO health contributions. By way of comparison, the premium payable for a good health insurance in certain European countries for one adult is as much as $400 per month. This includes an annual "deductible" of $120 per year (i.e. amount which the insured has to bear before any reimbursement can be made), and with limitations on worldwide coverage.

Of course, a minimum health insurance covering public or common ward in hospitals and other restricted benefits could be purchased for about $200 per month, again with an annual deductible. I leave it up to your readers to compare this with what they are required to pay for WHO coverage.

— Ann Van Hulle-Colbert

Staff Health Insurance

(The letter of 4 May came to our notice too late for printing; however, the above letter of rebuttal was inserted with the mailing of News No. 17 Spring, thus appearing simultaneously. As well, it is excerpted here, with reaction from a colleague. — Editor)

WE THE FAVOURED

I was very pleased to see the letter (page 8) from the Staff Health Insurance, as I had not understood the complaints about the level of contributions. Do these former staff not have contact with those less privileged than us, those with less pension than we have? Are they not aware of how much it costs to have an equivalent form of health insurance elsewhere?

After all, we are not forced to continue the WHO contributions and can go to other schemes if we wish. So often complaints emanate from those who have opted to take lump sums (well invested in either property or shares), and thus say they are existing on a low monthly income.

One makes one's choice, but I find in the present economic situation we, the favoured, should be content.

— Joan Robertson

Geneva
(formerly VBC)

LUXEMBOURG'S MUTUAL

AMFIE (Mutual Association of staff members of intergovernmental organisations having their offices in Europe) is a credit union established in Luxembourg in 1990 by a group of active and retired persons of U.N. agencies, OECD and EEC.


The advantages of AMFIE are:

- Returns on deposits higher than the rates available to individuals;
- Transfers and currency conversions in nine currencies free of charge;
- Free Eurocard card.

Confidentiality of individual accounts and security of investments are priorities. Members participate democratically in its management.

To join it is sufficient to purchase one member share of 10 ECU (1 ECU = US$ 1.18) — there are no other charges. The address: 9 rue Jean Pierre Sauvége, L-2514 Luxembourg.

— Dimitri Argyropoulos

Chairman

(According to AMFIE's 1993 report, pensioners represented 43 per cent of members, holding 52 per cent of deposits. Net interest rates for deposits: 4.17 per cent. —Editor)
The power of the bark of the African tree, *Pausinstalia yohimbe*, which has been used in traditional tribal medicine since time immemorial as an aphrodisiac, is now about to be reproduced by Simtex laboratories. After careful testing for safety in 20 centres worldwide, it will be marketed as a treatment for impotence.

In fact, Yohimbine hydrochloride has been available in established medicine for a long time. Roger Kirby, consultant urologist at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, says: "I have prescribed it for years. It is one of the few drugs... found useful in treating both impotence and the loss of libido."

Yohimbine hydrochloride, it is claimed, acts on the central nervous system to increase blood pressure and pulse rate; it has a psychological as well as a physical effect which combines to boost libido and enhance erections. Side-effects, of mania and anxiety, have been reported.

Even as recently as the 1970's, men who became impotent from such prosaic causes as drinking too much, diabetes or drug treatment for high blood pressure, heart failure and angina were still being treated as psychological cases.

In the majority of cases, however, a physical cause for the impotence can be demonstrated. The blood supply leading to the corpora, the spongy cavities which fill with blood during erection rather as a balloon fills with air, may be inadequate, as the arteries leading to the penis become narrowed in later years. Conversely, the corpora may fill with blood, but the valves may leak and they may soon be as flaccid as a balloon the day after a party.

Older men frequently do not realise that the fault lies in their falling hormone levels and not in their female companions' appearance. As testosterone levels fall, so do libido, potency and the youthful features of sexual arousal. Kirby says that it is this group of patients who may benefit most from treatment with yohimbine, usually combined with testosterone in some form, if tests show that their testosterone level is low.

The same group of patients are also responsive to penile injections, and an improved injection, prostaglandin E1, is to be marketed as Caverject by Upjohns. Many patients prefer to have an inflatable implant. Despite its greater cost (over £3,000), this is now considered preferable to the insertion of semi-rigid rods.

Without investigations no patient should ever accept that potency problems are all in the mind. Treatments exist and are being improved constantly.

— Thomas Stuttaford, M.D.

(Excerpted from Sunday Times, 22 March 1994. See also Le Figaro in French version, News.)

**Pensioners Protest Fare Increase**

AVIVO, the Association for the defence and relief of all pensioners, is indignant about the increased fares on Geneva public transport, and in particular about the 35 per cent to 40 per cent rise in reduced fares. Avivo has therefore sent a petition with more than 3000 signatures to the Geneva State Council. This fare increase hits hard at pensioners, the disabled and some young people, says Avivo, adding that its
representatives have not had an opportunity to meet the State Council since the petition was handed in.

(Excerpted from Journal de Genève, 18-19 June 1994)

THE PRIVILEGED AND THE EXCLUDED

I was very interested to read articles (in the Tribune de Genève, dated 2 & 14 July) about the World Trade Organisation (formerly GATT).

I am not in a position to judge how well-founded the German and Swiss proposals are, but as the wife of an international civil servant, who has lived in Geneva since 1978, I feel cheated by the promises that the Swiss government is making to the new diplomats and officials of the WTO, promises which, in effect, create two categories of civil servants — the privileged and the excluded.

- First, Geneva is going to establish a service agency whose role will be to help the newcomers to get installed. Although we have managed all by ourselves to deal with "the twists and turns of the administration," all the same, it is a welcome improvement for any efficient system to try to avoid wasting time.

- The second benefit granted to the diplomats is free access to the labour market for spouses, and exemption from TVA (Value Added Tax), and this is where the shoe pinches. Since I could not take a job within the U.N. system commensurate with my qualifications and abilities — in the absence of powerful political support — I had to be contented for several years with various lowly jobs which I eventually preferred to pass up rather than submit to the whims of less qualified persons who had got their positions thanks to political support.

When I asked to be granted a Permis C after 15 years of continuous residence in Geneva, the deadline being ten years for other foreigners who are not officials in the U.N. system, the Cantonal Office for Population replied as follows:

"Your right to live in Switzerland is conditional on that of your spouse.... We would further like to point out that the beneficiaries of a carte de légitimation cannot make any claim to the granting of benefits in respect of residence, work or establishment...."

It is hard to accept one's social non-existence when one is completely integrated in a town which seeks to fight for equality between men and women.

- The third privilege accorded to new officials coming from Moslem countries, and the one that the Geneva and Swiss community will find hardest to swallow, is that Berne proposes to authorise "limited polygamy," that is to say, permitting an official to install himself in Switzerland with two legitimate wives. This concept does not exist in the Islamic world, where polygamy consists of having up to four legitimate wives, and to imagine that — in this time of unemployment — the local population will take kindly to this new ethic smacks more of science-fiction than common sense.

From my experience, I have realised that a greater part of the local community still, in 1994, does not recognise the importance of the role that the U.N. and its officials play in Geneva; the fierce battle to retain the WTO in the heart of this city is living proof of that role.

I dedicate these few lines to all those who have had to set aside their careers as a result of excessive restrictions. Between intransigence and the acceptance of all comers there is a golden mean which can be called tolerance and breadth of spirit.

— Hiba Al-Hakim
Grand Lancy

(The writer is wife of M.G. Al-Hakim, Chief, TRA. The WTO will be established in Geneva beginning '95. Excerpted from Tribune de Genève, 5 August 1994)

STILL ALIVE VILLAGE NARBONNE

By the end of the century international civil servants, whether active or retired, will be able to spend their holidays or even install themselves permanently in the south of France, at Narbonne-Plage. The bathing resort in the department of l'Aude is reported ready to welcome a vast centre, to be known as "the international village." The departmental planning commission has just given its approval for this
enterprise, according to the French daily Les Echos.

About 600 homes, shops, a hotel and a conference centre are planned on an area of some 50 hectares. There will be a pleasure boat marina, and eventually even school facilities. Various agencies specialising in communication and scientific development will also be sited there, including a centre for research into Mediterranean tourism, a foundation for protection of the environment and, in particular, the International Centre for Information and Communication Resources (CIRIC).

As the central force behind this project, CIRIC should enable internationals to keep in direct contact with their organisations and to have access to data banks. "It is also intended to open a sort of labour exchange where international agencies can post their needs for temporary consultants. This will permit freelancers working from the village to stay informed about all opportunities that arise," commented an official at the United Nations in Geneva.

Will the international agencies themselves be asked to contribute? Not financially. But the promoters of the project hope that the agencies will put key information and data at the disposal of the CIRIC.

The Mayor of Narbonne will not spend one centime on the construction, which is estimated to cost some CHF 165 million (FF 660 million). Launched by retired international civil servants, the project is said to be entirely financed from private funds. Prince Khalid Ben Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is understood to be providing the funds needed to create the complex, in the form of a loan at prefential interest rates. The authorities in Riyadh have also announced a gift of CHF 15 million towards the construction of the CIRIC.

The agreement on the financing of the future complex was signed in London on 13 September 1993, according to Marc Delarbre, administrator of the management board of the international village. Originally the village was to have been set up in Lebanon, but the outbreak of war obliged the promoters to think again. Other countries in the Mediterranean basin were also considered, but Narbonne's accessibility by road, rail and sea, the quality of life and the level of prices current in the region finally succeeded in tipping the scales.

The first enterprise of its kind, this "international village" may well be followed by others. "Narbonne is going to harbour several hundred international civil servants but they number several tens of thousands all over the world, " says Marc Delarbre. Lebanon — which will shortly see the return of the Regional Commission of the U.N. — may in the end also host such a "village."

The departmental planning commission having given its support, all that remains now is to submit a definitive project. Then the public inquiry procedure will be started. If everything goes as planned, Jean-Pierre Rayssac, the Narbonne architect, hopes the work will start at the end of the first quarter of 1995, and will take five years to complete.

— Claire Kaplun

(Excerpted from Tribune de Genève, 26 August 1994)

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