Schwebel: The Secretary-General of the United Nations: His Political Powers and Practice

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This is a heartening view which, one hopes, is not just a pipe dream. Its validity depends on whether or not the forces producing instability are amenable to the instruments of stabilization policy discussed elsewhere in the volume. If these forces prove to be as deep-seated as they appear to have been in the past, there is little in this symposium which would lend credence to Samuelson's rosy view of the future.

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Mr. Schwebel's study, The Secretary-General of the United Nations, is a concise reminder of the close association between an institution and a man molding it. The juxtaposition of the Secretary-General's powers under Article 99 of the Charter with their practical implementation reveals the considerable growth of his actual powers. Mr. Lie's unmistakable imprint on this growth is well established by the author's exhaustive analysis of the Secretary-General's relationship with, and participation in, the main United Nations bodies. The Secretary-General has rarely failed to bring the weight of his office to bear upon the policy formulation of the United Nations. This influence is evidenced in the Secretary-General's annual report to the General Assembly, a report required by Article 98 and gradually seized upon by Mr. Lie as a convenient instrument for outlining a rational United Nations' policy. It is also seen in proposals submitted on the Secretary-General's own initiative, or his participation in drafting resolutions or preparing the Secretariat's working papers or legal memoranda. The Secretary-General's political power is most evident in Article 99, which authorizes him to "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." On the occasion of the North Korean aggression, the Secretary-General virtually invoked this authority in his introductory statement before the emergency session of the Security Council.

It would be the blindest folly to consider the Secretary-General as a mere administrator. "This is a political job," asserted Mr. Hammarskjold recently; "I am a political servant. Administration is just a tool put at my command."1 The Secretary-General's political importance was reflected in the protracted debates on Mr. Lie's successor and is fully elaborated and documented by Mr. Schwebel's present study.

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The book presents only minor points for criticism. The objectives and organizational structure of international organizations differ considerably, as do the conditions under which they operate. Utmost caution is advisable when making reference to, or comparison with the accomplishments of former Secretary-Generals. The author is well aware of the different positions assumed by Sir Eric Drummond, the League of Nations' first Secretary-General, and Albert Thomas, the first Director of ILO. Yet, fascinated by the success of Albert Thomas, Mr. Schwebel dismisses too lightly the important fact that Mr. Thomas received, from the very beginning, the full support of the workers and employers directly represented in the General Conference of the ILO. Although Mr. Thomas was gradually able to build up a strong public following, without relying on the governments of the member states, Sir Eric could never have hoped for this independent support.

The absence of a thorough appraisal of the Secretary-General's position on the Uniting for Peace Resolution of the General Assembly is unfortunate. The treatment of the Secretary-General's relation and liaison with the various field and functional commissions is also inadequate. For the sake of accuracy, Mr. Schwebel's discussion of Mr. Lie's action after the North Korean attack should be corrected. True, the Secretary-General called the emergency session of the Security Council at the request of the United States; however, it is a well known fact that Mr. Lie, three hours before Ambassador Gross' historical call, had already been informed about the aggression in Korea and had immediately requested the United Nations Commission on Korea for a further report. This report was available to the Security Council at its emergency meeting. Mr. Lie's prompt action, taken on his own initiative, deserves to be singled out.

This criticism is by no means meant to detract from the substantial merits and value of Mr. Schwebel's competent and realistic study, which carefully avoids strained theoretical arguments. It is a study of practice and, as such, is especially welcome.

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3. P. 11.
4. PHELAN, YES AND ALBERT THOMAS pp. xi-xii (1936).
6. P. 90.
7. 9 U.N. BULL. 71 (1950).
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