

**How to Choose a UN Chief - and how not to**, Erskine Childers & Brian Urquhart (1996), Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, ISSN: 0345-2328, (p/b), Price: N/K.

The problem of "*haphazard selection*" of the leaders of the United Nations, including the Secretary General, "*will not go away through neglect*", say UN veterans Sir Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers in a "fresh appraisal" of the problem they first addressed in 1990 in *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations*. The British and Irish authors point out that the process to date is "*far less searching or systematic than any small university's procedures for choosing a new president.*" The study is based on the assumption that the member governments really do wish to find the best possible person for the job of Secretary-General.

Calling for "*a personality both authoritative and charismatic*" as leader of the UN system, they make new and detailed proposals for governments to choose the UN Secretary-General more creatively, more systematically and more democratically. They propose that the General Assembly should adopt a comprehensive new policy including a single seven-year term to free the incumbent from reelection stresses and pressures. This is especially relevant given the recent furore at the UN over the reelection for a second term of Boutros Boutros Ghali and his forced departure following a veto by the United States.

Governments should search for the best possible person rather than waiting for names to surface from what the authors call "*quite literally an 'old-boy' network,*" which at the end merely finds "*a reasonably acceptable candidate who could get past five potential vetoes.*" The authors urge the Permanent Members (Britain, China, France, Russia and the USA) to relinquish their claimed right of veto over the nomination, saying "*the first to do so would be acclaimed by the world.*" They suggest that the lifting of the veto might be balanced by re-considering the tradition that no national of a permanent member of the Security Council can be a candidate for the post of Secretary General.

The study describes a positive search beginning with a public call for nominations, with a mid-point when a short list of between 5 and 10 selected names would be published by the Security Council. After 30 days for comment or additional suggestions from governments, parliamentarians, civic groups and media, the Security Council would resume the selection process. The candidates on a refined short list should then be interviewed by the Security Council before it sends a name to the General Assembly.

Urquhart and Childers believe that uncertainty as to how to find the best person for what the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, called "*the most impossible job on this earth*" stems partly from not distinguishing between qualities and qualifi-

cations. They list essential qualities for the post, including "*stature, integrity and moral courage...maturity of character and absence of excessive ego*" and "*executive ability and ability to choose the best deputies*" and to "*share the limelight.*" The search they recommend should be for such qualities, which should also include "*diplomatic skills and a worldview,*" but with higher emphasis on "*ability to communicate ideas and inspire people in the world at large.*"

Team leadership both in the UN and among its agency heads should be given greater attention. The authors argue that since no single human being can be expert in every field the UN chief has to deal with, far more attention must be paid to equipping him or her with a small team of Deputy Secretaries-General of the highest competence in the major fields of peace, economics, humanitarian affairs and management.

Urquhart and Childers say the fact that no woman has to date even been a candidate for Secretary General is "*grotesque and profoundly damaging,*" and that it would be "*very healthy for the international community*" if its next Secretary-General were a woman.

In a second chapter, on "*A System in Need of Leadership,*" the study analyses elections and appointments in the UN's specialised agencies and funds. The authors point out that the calendar of elections to head the agencies at present has no relation with that of appointment of the Secretary-General. Unless all top-level appointments are re-synchronised, the UN system will always be deprived of a well-formed executive cabinet.

This is the fifth in a series of studies by the two former UN civil servants that have been sponsored by the Ford and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundations. The book contains detailed statistics on the history of leadership in the UN system, including data that "*thoroughly refute the widespread canard that 'the UN system is dominated by the Third World majority'.*" Nationals of Western countries have held 70 per cent of all leadership positions in the UN system since 1946; in 1996 they still hold 62 per cent of all posts.

Sir Brian Urquhart, formerly Scholar-in-Residence at the Ford Foundation, was one of the first UN civil servants, retiring in 1986 as Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs after 41 years. Erskine Childers, currently Secretary-General of the World Federation of UN Associations (WFUNA), retired in 1989 as Senior Adviser to the UN Director-General for Development and International Economic Affairs after 22 years in the UN system.

The study is published by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, established in 1962 at Uppsala, Sweden, in memory of the second Secretary-General. It is a very interesting and well-researched book which is well worth reading for anyone with an interest in how the United Nations system operates.

*Reviewed by Nigel Hall, Editor of JSDA.*