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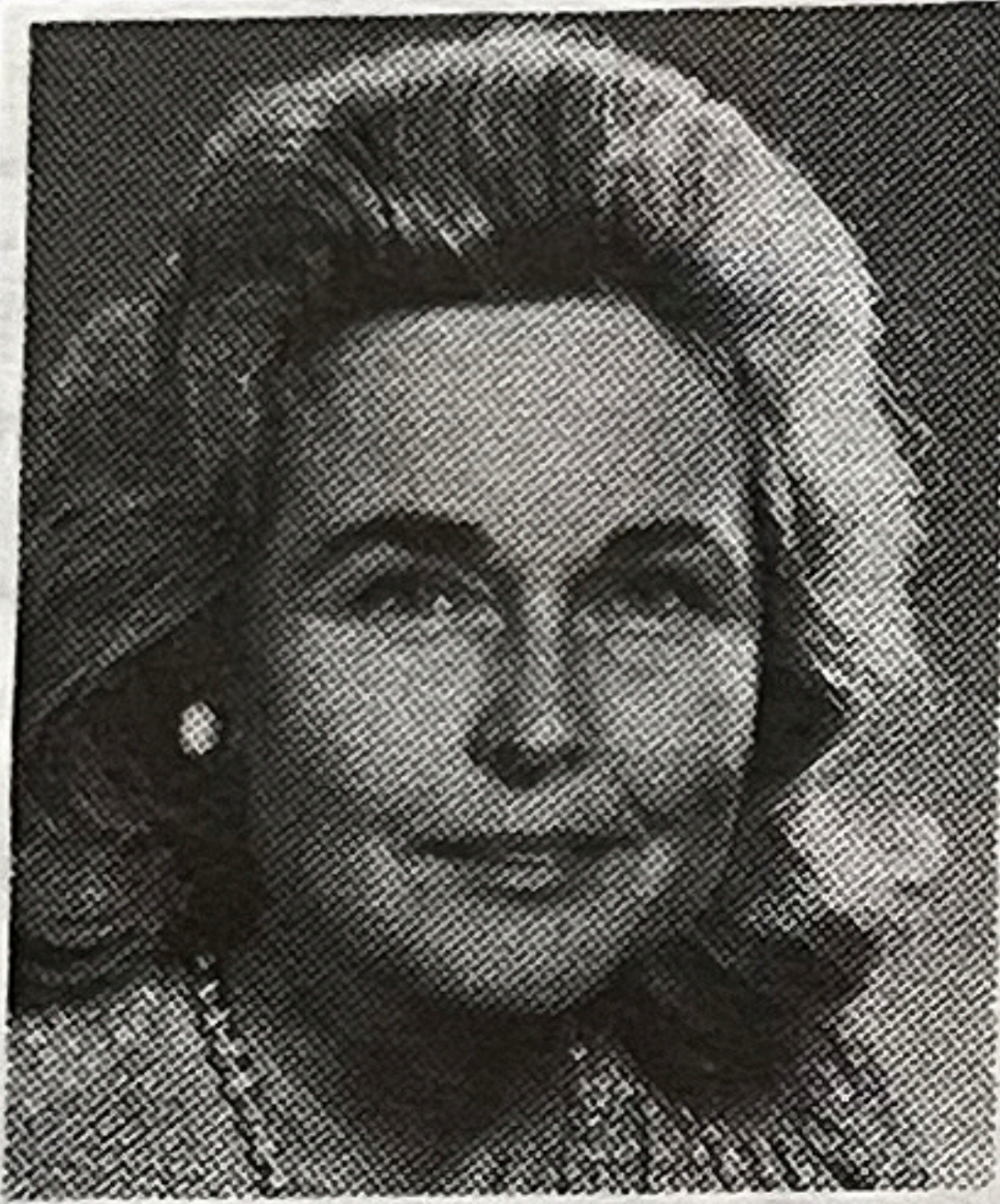
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"MELISSA WELLS HAS ALL IT TAKES"

A close look at the Top Manager of the UN



woman said reluctantly, as if she wanted to apologize for not having done enough in that short period of time since she took over the most powerful, but also most complex department of the Secretariat: the Department for Administration and Management. She is leaving the UN on 17 February.

Melissa Wells has faced other challenges in her life: she served as America's ambassador in Zaire and Uganda during turbulent times. She raised two children, while a full-time diplomat and later Resident Representative of the United Nations. "She has certainly all it takes", a devoted friend said the other day. Here are a few telling excerpts from an interview Mrs. Wells gave to two outstanding UN correspondents (Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat*, London, and Ted Morello of the *Far Eastern Review*, New York) in the course of a recent World Chronicle TV programme, moderated by Michael Littlejohns of the Financial Times and produced by the Department of Public Information. It was recorded at United Nations headquarters and speaks for itself.

Littlejohns: Madame Under-Secretary-General, the United Nations Secretariat has been getting quite a bit of flak lately from the media. They don't seem to be very admiring of this part of the UN system. There have been charges of corruption, waste, fraud, abuse, et cetera, et cetera, some of which may be exaggerated, some of which may have some basis in fact. What is your response to this almost campaign against the Secretariat?

Wells: Well, in a nutshell - and I've been on the job now for six months - I would say that those charges are exaggerated. There is no question that we have problems, involving fraud, involving waste. The scale, the magnitude that they are made out to be, I think is incorrect.

Littlejohns: And what are you doing, or what is your department doing to deal with such cases as do occur?

Wells: I think the first step in this direction was taken by the Secretary-General recently when he named an Assistant Secretary-General for Inspections and Investigations.

Littlejohns: But is there any prosecutorial function in the Secretariat? Can you bring people to book?

Wells: Well, we have our own disciplinary measures. I mean, they range from everything from a letter of reprimand to summary dismissal. And I myself, I think since I've come on the job, there have been four or five summary dismissals. It's not always fraud, mind you. Sometimes it's behaviour which I would call just totally incompatible with that of a United Nations staff member.

Morello: How much independence will this Inspector General have? Isn't there some talk about it being an insider that's investigating the inside from the inside?

Wells: I know, I've heard that criticism very often. He reports directly to the Secretary-General. The question that an insider has been brought into that position I think is a very good one. The UN system is extremely complex

Dergham: But is this enough, Madame, in order to institutionalize a mechanism of investigation, investigating what has gone wrong and what is going wrong? What are you doing beyond the appointment of one person to look at the charges?

Wells: I'm not sure I quite follow what you mean by institutionalizing. The fact that this office has been set up, I think, is sending a very clear signal through the system. And the fact that an even more powerful position will be set up, equally sends a signal.

But aside from the appointment of the new Assistant Secretary-General, I'm convinced that the UN will never be any better than the people in it. And we need to work on personnel and to have a true career system in the United Nations, which we don't have now. I was very pleased at a very recent staff management meeting that we had that we took decisions on a new performance appraisal form. Even the staff is ashamed of the way their performance is evaluated. We've designed a new form. We have agreed on a new assignments and promotion system. This is the nexus of trying to bring about reform in a personnel system, to make it competitive. I think this Secretary-General is very committed to developing a truly international career civil service.

Another important area, very important, is to draw a line at the senior levels between what will be political appointees and what is available to the careerists.

Littlejohns: You mean governments of Member States are interfering?

Wells: Governments insisting on placing people in senior positions at a level which they should not be any more. It's been going on for years. And my theory is that the staff, in an effort to protect itself against this, started pressuring and receiving what we call the permanent contracts. And now we're saddled with an awful lot of permanent contracts, because in order to dismiss someone, you have contractual obligations, you're taken to the Administrative Tribunal, and you have to pay. It's not a healthy system.

Morello: There is one suggestion that Mr. Vianello* made, isn't it, the idea of using the money from people he could cut from his staff - 700 I think the figure he gave - and putting it into something more modern than people. But he says that he's been forbidden to cut his staff. Is that true? Does he have a blanket order not to fire anybody?

Wells: I wouldn't say it's a blanket order not to fire anyone. What we've done is, in the whole restructuring of the UN, of the UN Secretariat, we try to redeploy. To say that you can just fire them, that, as far as I know, we can't do that, simply fire people. Except for cause, obviously, except for cause.

Dergham: Can I just read a quote of the Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros-Ghali, in describing his relationship with the United Nations bureaucracy, and that's a quote from *The New York Times*. "The only way to deal with bureaucrats is with stealth and sudden violence." Is this a directive, or is it tongue-in-cheek, that statement? I mean, which is it?

Wells: I think it must be tongue-in-cheek, because certainly, I was very impressed the first time I met the Secretary-General, when I had come to be interviewed for this job. We spent most of the time talking about the personnel system and the way he viewed it and how he wished to reform it. And those words didn't appear in it at all.

Dergham: So you -

Wells: But he's tough, he's tough. He can be very tough. And you're going to have to be tough if you're going to draw a line between the political and the career.

Dergham: Well, then, the one-year contract approach with these political appointees, doesn't it freeze people in a very

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FAREWELL TO OVER-HEAD POSTS

While the Secretary-General made quite clear that "no staff member will lose his/her job as a result of restructuring" fixed-term staffers on posts financed by extra-budgetary means (so-called overhead-posts) are now facing termination, but also permanent staffers are worried. The Staff Union is insisting on re-assignment and has ruled out "agreed termination". "It was done before", a union official told UN STAFF REPORT, "with the result that the best and brightest left and had to be rehired later to keep the Secretariat afloat."

At an emergency meeting with Under-Secretary-General Melissa Wells in early January several cases of general service staffers who had already been fired were reported. But also professionals on overhead posts were warned that their contracts would not be renewed.

TROUBLE AT STAFF COUNCIL: SIEGENTHALER BREAKS DOWN, ELECTIONS NOW ON 26-28 JANUARY

In a moving show of despair Staff Union President Fred Siegenthaler broke down in tears and could not continue his appeal for travel funds during the last Staff Council meeting of last year in Conference Room 5 on December 17. Challenged by Council members over his insistence on taking First and Second Vice Presidents Clarke and Waters to the CCISUA Assembly in Vienna this month, he called their behaviour "unconsciable" and threatened to resign. Then, suddenly, his voice broke, he started crying and had to beg for time to recover. Startled Council members came to his assistance and

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MELISSA WELLS HAS ALL IT TAKES...

subordinate sort of position that if you do well, and I'm the boss, and you do what I want, that's fine, you might have your contract renewed, and if you swerve away from what I want, well, watch out?

Littlejohns: *The New York Times* said that you people are "frozen in fear", I believe. Is that -

Wells: Well, I'm on a one-year contract.

Littlejohns: Are you frozen in fear?

Wells: No. Not at all. I don't feel that way. I don't know how my other colleagues feel. I do know there is a lot of criticism on that. I frankly think it's a good idea for a new Secretary-General starting out, with new people that he doesn't know, to offer them one-year contracts.

Dergham: But is this a healthy, ongoing approach in terms of political appointees on the top level of management of the United Nations? Is this going to be standard, or is this just temporary?

Wells: I don't know whether it will last throughout the whole term of the Secretary-General. I don't know. But certainly in a restructured, rapidly-changing secretariat, I don't find it's a bad idea at all. The implication is that if you get a four- or five-year contract that you will perform much better? I'm not so sure!

Dergham: Well, that's because there is quite low morale at the United Nations. People are sort of afraid, at all levels. And I'm just wondering whether this is, on the top level, attributable to the short term, or whether it is just, all in all, people are afraid of what's going to happen, they are frightened for their future, they don't know what's going on. It's not a healthy mood, and I'm wondering if you are aware of this, and -

Wells: Yes. Let's face it. Most of us at the top level come from governments, it's not as if we walked off the street into this super political job. And I think it's only fair that if it doesn't work out for any reason, or if you're not producing, that the Secretary-General has a free hand to change it. Those who are in the senior political positions and who are career people are protected by the career system. So I don't see - I don't agree with the grouseurs at all.

Littlejohns: Is morale really low? Raghida said something about low morale. Is it actually so low, do you think, in the Secretariat generally?

Dergham: Yes ...

Wells: Yes, I fear it is. It is low.

Littlejohns: And why?

Wells: It is low.

Littlejohns: Because of uncertainties about -

Wells: Uncertainties. I mean, I must give credit where credit is due. The six months I've spent here thus far I have worked with some of the finest people - and this is my second incarnation in the UN system, I had seven years in UNDP earlier.

Littlejohns: And you were also in the US Mission to the UN.

Wells: I was at the US mission, and I've had over 30 years in the US diplomatic service. I work with some of the finest, most dedicated people there are, who work 10, 11 hours every single day. Every single day. And I worry about them. I'll be very open here, on camera, in front of the whole world. There have been five people in six years in my job, and so far I've had very good relations with my staff, and I can sense that their great worry is that I will disappear. I'm not saying that I should not disappear, but it's almost poignant. And these are people who are trying very, very hard. I have great respect for the staff members.

* Marco Vianello-Chiodo, former Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information.

QUOTATION OF THE MONTH

"All economies are in trouble, no wonder the UN has no money" (USG Melissa Wells on the current financial difficulties of the United Nations)

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TROUBLE AT STAFF COUNCIL...

voted for allocation of funds exceeding \$ 5,000 by 17 to two votes. Visibly recovered ("Perhaps I have been in the job too long", he explained) Siegenthaler thanked the Council and promised that his delegation would act in accordance with the Council's desires.

In the elections First Vice President Clarence Clark, former Second Vice President Mohamed Oummih and Second Vice President Rosemarie Waters are so far expected to run for President as Siegenthaler is retiring.

IMPULSE

How about this for a better environment: UNEP's new attractive Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell (Canada) has invited staffers to drop in and see her without appointment between 12 and 12:30 at noon whenever she is at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

**COUNCIL DIARY**

by Kathy Hoffman

It was inevitable - the insecurity and general weirdness pervading this house in the last few months could not but penetrate the Staff Council and overshadow the Council's efforts to deal with a long list of concerns which could have a considerable impact on the staff. The Staff Committee President, saying that while differences of opinion inside were acceptable, even announced his intention to resign if the Council took action - or failed to act on important matters - that would make the New York Staff Union look foolish in a public forum like the upcoming meeting of the Coordinating Committee of Independent Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA).

Just when the Council was about to get serious about issues to be taken up by the January meeting of the CCISUA, to select screening committees for the Appointment and Promotion bodies and consider the best approach for dealing with differences in opinion among staff reps at different duty stations over a new performance evaluation system, the Economic and Social Affairs staff were notified that overhead funding for more than 100 posts would dry up at the end of the year. Suddenly Council meetings for several weeks were largely dominated by discussions of how the administration was preparing for the coming crunch (maddeningly secretive, in at least one department) and what could be done to help dozens of staff whose posts would disappear.

LESS DPI

Then the staff reps in the Department of Public Information learned of a threatened 10 per cent reduction in posts, and there was a spirited argument over which pending disaster should take priority on the Council's battered agenda. Only by scheduling a pre-holiday Friday meeting and some telephone strong-arming to secure a quorum could the Council take some decisions.

The Council finally decided to urge that priority in filling vacancies be given to permanent staff who had to be redeployed from vanished posts and that the current freeze on Professional recruitment be continued until all affected staff are placed. This is a fine gesture of solidarity which if adhered to will keep some people in jobs, but a trifle hard on others who had hopes of a well-earned promotion that now may be blocked by a refugee staff member redeployed from another Department. People missing out on promotions had better remember to be glad they still have posts.

Then, a week before Christmas, came the matter of the CCISUA Assembly scheduled for Vienna in January and how many representatives to send from New York. Here, with elections for the next Staff Council and Staff Committee less than a month away, politics (surprise!) reared its head.

MORE TIME

There were those who declaimed on plotting and scheming by the current Staff Committee to extend its term by delaying the elections beyond the November date mandated by the newly revised Union Statute, conveniently ignoring the fact that the date of the referendum on the revisions - which is under the control of the Polling Officers and not the Council or the Committee - made it impossible to hold the first elections under the new Statute on the date ordained.

The Staff Committee proposed to send its First and Second Vice Presidents to Vienna along with the President, who was already going as President of CCISUA. As both Vice Presidents were believed to be planning to run for President, this did not sit well with some on the Council with other candidates in mind.

There were proposals that New York ask that the CCISUA Assembly be delayed until after the New York elections, but the Council didn't go for that. "Imagine if a Member State asked that the General Assembly session be delayed to accommodate its elections", said one representative who seldom speaks up in the Council. "Why are we even discussing this? Our problems won't change because of the election; it doesn't matter who goes. Sometimes I feel this is an unreal situation."

OFF TO VIENNA

After a series of laments about politically motivated attacks and efforts to block vital action, one rep pointed out that every criticism isn't necessarily a political attack, and as for pre-election maneuvering, well, he hadn't heard a sound about elections (which remark was greeted with a sound snorts and other indications of disbelief).

Both CCISUA and the Secretariat-wide Staff-Management Coordinating Committee have amply demonstrated that the view from Headquarters on any given issue isn't necessarily the perspective held by staff elsewhere, and in both those bodies New York can be outvoted. Realizing the importance of strong representation for the Headquarters Staff Union, the Council finally, as its last act of 1993, voted funds to send the two Vice Presidents to Vienna to represent New York at the CCISUA Assembly. Then everybody straggled out of the room only too glad for a holiday.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE**

Seldom before has a subject aroused so much interest among Staff and Administration as Jay Axelbank's series on "Administrative Injustice" in the Secretariat. The following letters are only a selection of more than 25 received:

Dear Editor,

It is with considerable astonishment that I read in the last issue of the UN STAFF REPORT a quotation attributed to me in Mr. Axelbank's article on the administration of justice at the UN, namely that the Joint Appeals Board Secretariat is staffed "largely by those whose knowledge of administrative law leaves a lot to be desired". I never made that statement.

I know that I may count on you to publish this rebuttal in the next issue.

Fred Siegenthaler
President, Staff Union

Dear Editor,

The series on the UN justice system, written by an independent reporter, Mr. Jay Axelbank, has too many inaccuracies to comment on. It is a very slanted and often untrue depiction of the justice system. The administration of Justice system has serious problems, but I have not yet seen them seriously addressed by Mr. Axelbank.

The Staff Union has a very active Legal Committee which has comprehensively discussed all aspects of the justice system. This Committee has already issued two reports to the Council and a third will be submitted shortly. The Legal Committee was never asked to write any article on the Administration of Justice, although we are all staff members with considerable experience and knowledge about the system. It is unfortunate that an outsider was approached to tackle such an important and specialized subject when an abundance of knowledge in this area exists among the staff.

I would like to draw the attention of all readers to the statement at the top right on this newspaper's cover which reads "Views expressed in UN STAFF REPORT do not necessarily represent the views of the Staff Council or Staff Committee". The Staff Committee has very little input into the content of the UN STAFF REPORT. We suggest corrections to the Editor but it is ultimately his decision whether or not to make them.

Rosemarie Waters
Second Vice-President,
Staff Committee, and
Chairperson,
Legal Committee

Dear Editor,

In a section of the article appropriately entitled "Lack of Knowledge" - if the reference is to the author - it is alleged that the JAB Secretariat is staffed "largely by those whose