staff news
INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND
JULY/AUGUST 1984

The furniture open house was attended by about 300 staff members who wanted to have an input in the selection of new furniture. Staff members were able to "test" the different furniture samples by actually working on word and data processing equipment.

THE FURNITURE NEEDS OF THE FUND are changing rapidly as the use of office automation equipment spreads throughout most departments. Office furniture must now be fully compatible with the word- and data-processing equipment currently in operation and with any equipment that may be installed in the future. The Administration Department began doing something about this last year. The open house held on August 17 to familiarize staff with available office automation support furniture was just one of the final steps in a project undertaken by the staff of the Facilities Group of Service and Supply--in collaboration with other Fund offices and with outside consultants--to design office furniture that will fit the specific needs of the Fund.

Most offices in the Fund now have either Lexitrons, NBIs, or personal computers, and the use of this equipment is likely to continue to spread. But the furniture in our offices was not designed to house keyboards, central processing units, monitors, or printers. Thus, most Fund staff are at present working in highly inefficient conditions that are not conducive to high productivity.

One of the main aims of the Facilities Group was to come up with designs that would solve many of the current problems while satisfying the needs of a majority of the staff. Moreover, the furniture needed to be flexible enough so that it would work equally well in a private or outer office, would adapt to physical differences among users, and would be fully integrated with present furniture. And it had to be "universal," so that it could support office automation equipment designed by different manufacturers.

Since no one knows the needs of users

better than the users themselves, the Administration Department decided to hold a number of workshops designed to elicit ideas that could be incorporated into the final design. The workshops had Fund-wide representation, with about four members of each department attending. In addition, Administrative Officers were invited to attend separate workshops to familiarize them with the type of equipment being evaluated.

The furniture we now have was not designed to accommodate office automation equipment.

The workshop for workstation users provided an opportunity for those who are frequent users of automated office equipment to describe the kind of office furniture that would best suit their needs--and why. Those attending the workshop were encouraged to "think big" in terms of the types of furniture that they thought would create ideal office conditions. In order to help them identify the advantages and disadvantages of various types of furniture, the workshop participants were given a "hands-on" demonstration of the alternatives being considered for purchase by the Fund. Participants were then grouped into small teams to discuss and rank the characteristics that they thought were most desirable in an office.

The brainstorming session revealed that, contrary to what an observer of typical Fund offices might think, no one wants to work at a cluttered, makeshift, poorly lit workstation. Trying to adapt existing furniture to new equipment has led to such unsatisfactory arrangements as placing keyboards on top of dictionaries to make them the correct height, storing paper for continuous print paper feeders under tables, and placing working papers on top of screens to make them accessible. In the brainstorming session, almost all participants ranked adequate workspace and storage as the number one priority, followed closely by comfortable chairs, adequate lighting, and wiring that is out of the way of one's feet. Participants agreed that an uncluttered, well-lighted work space would lead to greater efficiency and more productivity. Another necessary characteristic of any new furniture, according to the results of the workshop, is that it be flexible, not only in terms of use by various staff members, but also in terms of use for various purposes. Each office arrangement is different, and the way one staff member wants it arranged may be different from the way another staff member wants it.

One problem that was brought out in the workshop was that the Fund has already invested a considerable amount of money in the existing line of Scanway furniture, and it would be very expensive to purchase an entirely new line of furniture. Unfortunately, the Scanway furniture was designed and purchased before office automation was being considered. Scanway is now modifying its existing furniture line to accommodate office automation; the furniture is expected to be as functional as if it had been designed exclusively for automated offices.

The point was also made at the workshop that many staff have complained that conditions are now so bad that anything would be better--so why waste time with all the workshops and discussions? While some sympathy was expressed for this view, it was also felt that the furniture workshops and open house were valuable for helping Administration anticipate the needs and problems of Fund staff and the new requirements of automation before the furniture is ordered and delivered.

The Administration Department has now ordered 40 sets of sample furniture to be distributed among staff members for their evaluation. Each employee participating in the testing will receive one of two basic units, both of which satisfy the criterion that the furniture be flexible. The first of these is a terminal table measuring 50 inches across; it can be moved up and down so that a user can adjust it according to his or her own height. The second one measures 36 inches across and features a special movable cut-out just large enough to accommodate a keyboard; this cut-out can be adjusted not only up and down but also back and forth. Both of these units are free-standing and may thus be installed at a 90-degree angle to a desk or in any other place in the office, depending on the preference of the user. In addition, participants will receive a number of modular units that will be fitted to the basic units. The type of units assigned to staff members will depend on the needs of individual users, but will usually include printer stands, central processing unit stands (for personal computers), and frames that can house the drawer units currently placed on the left side of professional desks and on the extension of the support staff desks.

The Administration Department expects that the samples will be delivered to the Fund by mid-November. After a trial period of about two months, staff members who participate in the sampling will be interviewed and their evaluations will be used to determine the type of modifications needed. Once this process is completed, the Fund will place a large order with Scanway for delivery by mid-April. The intention is that by allowing sufficient time for the selection and evaluation process, the type of furniture finally agreed upon will not only meet the Fund's office automation needs but also meet with the approval of a majority of the staff.

THANKS TO OUR READERS for taking the time to fill out the questionnaires we sent out with our last issue. The results are quite enlightning and will be useful in our efforts to tailor Staff News to the needs of most of the staff.

We received 254 replies, the large majority (231) of which were from regular members of the staff and from staff members of the offices of Executive Directors. The 231 responses represent about 14 percent of the roughly 1,600 staff members of the Fund.

Judging from the responses to the questionnaire, most of the staff seem to like Staff News. About 66 percent of you considered the quality of the newsletter to be "excellent" or "good" (this last category was not offered as an alternative, but a number of staff wrote it in). Only 2 percent considered the quality of the publication "poor," while the remaining 32 percent throught it was "fair."

The survey indicated that Staff News is read regularly. About 81 percent of you seem to read it "always," with staff that read it "often" trailing behind at 18 percent; only 1 percent of you read it seldom. But it seems that not as many of you find it useful for obtaining information about both the activities of the staff and the non-operational work of the Fund (51 percent found it useful, 38 percent said it was useful "often," while 11 percent considered that it was seldom useful).

In general, staff members seem to enjoy the publication, although reactions to the different sections of Staff News are mixed. Only two categories (articles about outside activities of staff members and about Fund activities in general) were rated "highly interesting" by more than half of you. And two sections that we thought would be rated highly (Art Society exhibits and Retirements) were judged by a relatively large number of you to be either "somewhat interesting" or "not very interesting" at all. Ratings for the remaining two categories (promotions or appointments of senior staff and announcements of births, marriages, transfers, etc.) were divided roughly equally between "highly interesting" and "somewhat interesting."

The survey also included questions designed to give us a better picture of the type of material we should include in the publication. The overwhelming majority of you (84 percent) favor the introduction of a "Letters to the Editor" column. We are glad to comply, and plan to begin this feature in our next issue (please see box on page 5 for details). There was also strong support for increased coverage of articles on outside activities of staff members and of the work of the various Fund offices. Backing for more articles on activities of the different clubs was relatively less strong, with about 44 percent of respondents voting against any increase in this type of article. A substantial number of you wanted to see increased coverage of the activities of the Staff Association Committee in Staff News. By contrast, roughly 61 percent of you were against the idea of including articles about Fund operations and policies in the publication. About 11 percent of you did agree, however, to the introduction of such articles--as long as they were written in absolutely non-technical terms and then only when special circumstances warranted their inclusion in Staff News.

One of the more salient conclusions emerging from the survey is that staff members want Staff News to appear more frequently. A full 77 percent of you would like to see it published on a monthly basis or even more frequently (twice a month or weekly). Of the remainder, 20 percent would prefer that the frequency of publication continue as at present (bi-monthly), while 3 percent would prefer a quarterly publication schedule. With regard to the presentation of the Staff News, 77 percent prefer the current newsletter format to any of the alternatives.

A significant number of staff members not only filled out the questionnaire but took the time to write comments, both positive and negative. Many of you gave us suggestions for future articles, and we plan to follow up on as many of them as possible.

Some of the positive comments we received were:

◇ "In its present form it is a great improvement over what it was....We thank you and wish you greater success in the future."

◇ "Staff News is a useful communications tool and a high quality product."

◇ "Staff News is doing a reasonably good job and I would not tinker with it."

◇ "We think the Staff News as it is now published is great."

◇ "I think that the Staff News is a very interesting publication."

◇ "It is nice to have the personal side...and different ideas presented of what the Fund is all about on an informal level."

◇ "Staff News is quite attractive and I think it should continue to be 'light' reading."

◇ "I think Staff News is just fine."

However, we also received replies that said:

◇ "The quality varies from article to

article. Some of the articles...are stodgily written, although the subject matter is in itself interesting."

◇ "The World Bank has a much more lively newsletter and you should try to emulate it."

◇ "More editorial effort is needed to search for interesting news items on staff members."

◇ "In its present form it is totally irrelevant, and so the best course is to discontinue it altogether."

◇ "Regret that since EXR took over Staff News it seems that both its frequency and level of excellence have deteriorated. Staff News used to be...a meaningful, useful, informative, and widely read journal. Sadly it is now none of these."

On the unfavorable comparison that some of you made with The Bank's World, we agree that it is an excellent publication. But two points should be emphasized: First, our budget is substantially smaller than that of The Bank's World, effectively preventing us from using more color, better paper quality, and more sophisticated publishing techniques. Second, the number of staff assigned to work in the Staff News (only one part-time editor) is less than one-eighth that of The Bank's World (three editors and a graphic artist--all of whom are primarily assigned to The Bank's World--plus support staff). These two major differences will, of necessity, create divergences between the two publications, especially with regard to timeliness of publication, appearance, and editorial content. We will nonetheless make every attempt to comply with your stated wishes, subject to the limitation of staff and budget.

ONE OF THE FIRST CHANGES we will institute as a result of the readership poll is the introduction of a Letters to the Editor column. We expect to begin featuring it in our next issue. Therefore, we invite staff members who would like to express opinions about matters of concern to the staff in general (please, no letters about operational policy issues) to write to the Editor, Staff News, Room 10-548. If you have questions that you would like answered and that you feel may be shared by other staff members, please send them in to us and we will publish them along with a reply from appropriate officials if possible. As a matter of editorial policy, we request that all letters be signed. Should anonymity be requested, we will make every possible effort to comply. However, if we feel that the opinions expressed in a letter call for a signature, we will advise the writer, and give him or her the final word on whether the letter will be published or not. As is customary for Letters to the Editor, the editor of Staff News reserves the right to edit letters for length and editorial style, if needed, and to select those that will be published.

THE TAX STATUS OF MANY G-IV STAFF may be radically altered by the new income tax law signed by President Reagan on July 18. Provisions in the Tax Reform Act of 1984 could have significant tax implications for some staff members of the Fund. A change that may affect a large number of staff is the new definition of resident alien for U.S. tax purposes.

Non-U.S. nationals, including holders of G-IV visas, have until now had the possibility of establishing residency for U.S. tax purposes by demonstrating an intent to remain indefinitely in the

United States. Some Fund staff have claimed resident alien tax status in order to take advantage of certain differences in the tax treatment of residents and nonresidents with respect to available deductions, capital gains on the sale of a principal residence, spousal income, and other non-Fund income. However, many G-IV visa holders will no longer have the option of claiming U.S. resident status for tax years beginning in January 1985.

In defining residency for U.S. tax purposes, the new law states that a non-U.S. national will be classified as a resident or nonresident alien according to an objective test of length of time present in the United States. Days spent in the U.S. by an individual "temporarily present in the United States by reason of...being a full-time employee of an international organization" may not be counted toward meeting the "substantial presence test." Unless such individuals have some other basis for filing income tax returns on a resident basis (for example, by holding a permanent resident visa or by filing jointly with a spouse who is a U.S. national or resident), they will be treated as nonresident aliens in tax years beginning after December 31, 1984.

Staff members who believe they may be affected by the provisions of the new law should consult Administrative Circular 84/23 and may wish to seek advice from a competent authority on U.S. tax matters. Staff are cautioned that the "Guide to Staff Legal Problems" prepared by the Legal Department of the Fund has not yet been updated to reflect the changes made by the new law, and that the Guide is not a substitute for professional advice on specific personal legal problems they may face during their period of service with the Fund in Washington. Staff members with specific questions about the implications of the new law may wish to consult Ms. Linda Goldman, the Legal Services consultant of the Fund, who can be reached at Extension 58141.

WATCHING THE OLYMPIC GAMES ON TELEVISION became a national sport last month for many of us who were unable to spend those historic two weeks in Los Angeles. And to some of the Fund staff members who were glued to their TV sets for the duration, the games took on an extra aura of excitement when they discovered that one of their colleagues was not just a spectator but was, instead, taking part in the games. The Fund representative at the Olympics was none other than Christer Ahl, Assistant Chief of the Staff Development Division of the Administration Department. His tie-in with the Olympics? As Chief Referee for the U.S. Team Handball Federation, Mr. Ahl not only refereed a number of games but was also responsible for supervising the 20 or so handball technicians working at the Olympics and for acting as the U.S. Federation's liaison with the

Christer Ahl in uniform.

International Handball Federation.

His position as Chief Referee for the United States has permitted him to participate in many national and international conferences and tournaments. But as Mr. Ahl explains it, taking part in the Olympics "adds an extra dimension" to the sport. And being in the midst of the opening ceremonies was, he concedes, "a particularly exciting event made even more so by the knowledge that I would play a part in the games." Moreover, the Olympics afforded Mr. Ahl an opportunity that not many of his Swedish compatriots have had. "I had the chance to talk to the King of Sweden when he attended a game in which the Swedish team was playing," he recalls. "On a separate occasion," he continues, "I was also introduced to other members of the royal family who walked into my room when I least expected it."

But being in the Olympics also presented problems, he concedes. For example, the fact that the Olympics were held in the United States put some additional pressure on the officials of the U.S. Team Handball Federation. Mr. Ahl explains that "the Europeans were a bit skeptical about our ability to arrange such a big team handball tournament in an impeccable way in the United States. Fortunately, we managed to show them that their suspicions were unwarranted." Less fortunately for the Federation, the performance of the U.S. teams during the Olympics was not as good, with the the men's team taking 9th place (out of 12) and the women's team coming in 5th (out of 6). The winner of both the men's and women's competitions was Yugoslavia.

The sport that so enthralls the King of Sweden--whose countrymen came in fifth (Sweden had no women's team)--and millions of spectators in many countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere is not the game played by individuals in recreation centers, in which the ball is slapped by hand against a wall. Team handball (or just handball in most other countries) is a fast-paced indoor sport in which two teams of seven players each are pitted against each other on a court similar to, but somewhat larger than, a basketball court. The task of each team is to get a cantaloupe-sized ball into the opponent's goal thus scoring points. Team handball is akin to soccer except that it is played with the hands instead of the feet. It can also be considered a close relative of basketball, but handball is played at a much faster pace and with goals (like soccer) instead of baskets. Team handball only began to take hold in the United States in 1959, when the U.S. Team Handball Federation was established. But because of intense interest in other indoor sports, it has not spread as quickly as the Federation would like.

Now 36, Mr. Ahl first became interested in team handball as a child. He explains that in his native Sweden, as in many other European countries, team handball is one of the favorite indoor sports and the one played the most by school children during winter. Although he enjoyed the sport immensely, he was never, as he puts it, "a first rate player." So at the age of 16 he decided to become a referee instead. His decision was highly unusual, since in most cases players do not become referees until they are in their mid-thirties. But it was obviously the correct choice, for he soon became well known in team handball circles as one of the best referees in the country. He continued refereeing handball (and also soccer--his other favorite sport) for ten years until he came to the United States. Upon learning that he was coming to this country, the U.S. Team Handball Federation offered him a job as Chief Referee. Mr. Ahl accepted the challenge and has held that position for the past decade.

In general, the responsibilities of the Chief Referee include refereeing selected games, recruiting new referees, training them, setting up rules and regulations for the sport, and ensuring that the game is played according to international standards. A referee's life is not an easy one, Mr. Ahl maintains. Not only must the referee determine what happened in a situation and make a decision as to what the consequences should be, but he must also "sell" the decision to the players and spectators. In order to carry out his functions, a referee must know the game inside out, have a sixth sense so as to not only "see" but also "feel" when something is amiss, possess good judgment so that he can decide on the proper punishments for infractions of the rules, and be fair so that his decisions will not be challenged.

But the job also provides many rewards. For example, when Mr. Ahl went on a Fund recruitment mission to Korea last year, he was invited to referee an exhibition game and to give a lecture to top Korean referees. As he recalls, "I was picked up at the office of the Minister of Finance and taken directly to an arena where several thousand people were waiting to watch the game, which had been arranged specifically for me."

Mr. Ahl is also the Chief Referee for the Pan-American Handball Federation--the authority on rules and refereeing for the 15 countries in the Western Hemisphere in which team handball is played. In this capacity, he has helped design training programs and teaching material to promote the sport. In addition, for an occasional change of pace, Mr. Ahl sometimes referees local soccer games.

According to Mr. Ahl, "my work for both team handball federations is time-consuming and takes up a large part of my weekends or, as in the case of the Olympics, even annual leave." Asked whether he would like to make it a full-time occupation, he explains that "even if it could easily be expanded into a full-time occupation, it could never become a profession, competing with my Fund career." As he points out, the sport is truly amateur and it would be impossible to make a living at it (none of the federation officials are paid for their services). But, he concedes, "if my services are still in demand when I retire...."

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THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF BRETTON WOODS was celebrated on July 26 by the Executive Directors and Alternate Executive Directors with a luncheon.

The toast to "The Fund" was offered by Dr. Edward Bernstein, formerly the Fund's Director of Research, who was a member of the U.S. delegation to the Conference. The text of his remarks will be published soon, but copies are available now from Mr. Prowse (Room 11-216).

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IF A FRIEND OR RELATIVE VISITING YOU from abroad develops health problems that require immediate hospitalization, you may be required to pay the bill. This is a very real risk that should be kept in mind when asking visitors to stay with you. For this reason, staff members are reminded that when bringing relatives or friends to the United States the visitors should have medical insurance.

The best (and usually most expensive) plans are comprehensive individual policies offered by reputable companies such as Blue Cross. Less safe from the standpoint of financial risk is the short-term emergency medical coverage for visitors offered by a number of insurance companies.

The Smith-Sternau Organization has developed a foreign visitors' emergency and health plan, which is being made available to visitors of Fund and Bank staff. The cost of coverage ranges from $40 a month for young adults to $150-200 a month for persons over 65. Brochures describing Smith-Sternau's plan may be picked up in Room 6-320.

New Members of the Fund Staff

Akira Ariyoshi
Japan - ASD

Philippe Beaugrand
France - AFD

Eduardo R. Borensztein
Argentina - AFD

Adrienne Cheasty
Ireland - WHD

Yannick R. Chevalier
France - BLS

Thomas Duffy
U.S.A. - WHD

Robert A. Feldman
U.S.A. - TRE

Danielle Gree
France - BLS

Reza Kibria
Bangladesh - BUR

Ewe-Ghee Lim
Malaysia - ASD

VAN POOL UPDATE

Adelphi/College Park, Md. The "New Hampshire Express" arrives at the World Bank at 8:50 a.m. and departs at 5:40 p.m. It serves New Hampshire Avenue at the Beltway to Langley Plaza. Spot seats are occasionally available. For information, contact: Mr. Leong, Ext. 72847.

Annandale, Va. This van pool has pick-ups at Braddock Baptist Church and at Ravensworth Baptist Church. Contact: Janice L. Sanders, Ext. 73411.

Cheverly/Landover, Md. The "Cheverly Express" needs additional permanent riders. It uses Route 202 to the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, arriving at the Bank at 9:30 a.m. and departing at 6:05 p.m. For information, contact: Ms. Tribble, Ext. 60686 or Ms. Amoakohene, Ext. 32774.

Rockville, Md. (Montrose/Montgomery Mall). Metrobus is likely to discontinue its N-7, N-9, and N-11 bus routes by the end of this year. Contact Jim Edmonds at Ext. 73411 if you are interested in forming a van pool from this area.

Springfield, Va. The "Blue Marble" has vacancies for riders until October 12. It also has a vacancy for a rider who would be willing to serve as a backup driver in return for free rides. Contact: Pam Sverski, Ext. 60149.

Vienna, Va. The "Wolf Trap Express" has two openings for permanent riders. It departs Wolf Trap barn at 7:30 a.m. and arrives at 7:55 a.m. It leaves at 4:35 p.m. The van makes one stop at the Wolf Trap entrance to the Dulles Access Road. Contact: Colin McFadyen, Ext. 69082.

YOUR BLOOD CAN HELP SAVE A LIFE. People with a history of hepatitis or jaundice, or who have taken anti-malaria medicine within the past three years, and who are presently in good health are eligible to donate blood to be used for research purposes. The American Red Cross Research Program needs your help if it is to continue to improve blood and blood products through its research program. If you are interested in participating in this project or would like further information, please contact Terri Young, Special Recruiter, at 728-6568.

TWENTY-YEAR STAFF. Alicia Roca and Karin Schumacher, both of the IMF Institute, commemorated twenty years of service with the Fund in May. In July, Paul Chabrier of the Middle Eastern Department and Carmen D.J. Leister of the Bureau of Statistics commemorated twenty years of service.

MARRIAGE. Sonia Boyle-Hebron of the African Department was married to Alexander Bright on June 30.

BIRTHS. A son, Rémy A-Jaoudi, was born on February 17 to Renée and Roger A-Jaoudi; a daughter, Melanie Ann, was born on June 8 to Ana J. and Charles G. Stevens; a daughter, Caroline Marie, was born on July 19 to Mr. and Mrs. David V. Pritchett; a daughter, Annika Elizabeth, was born on August 18 to Mr. and Mrs. Carl-Johan Lindgren; and a son, Arup, was born on August 29 to Mr. and Mrs. Biswajit Banerjee.

RETIREES. The following staff members retired from the Fund. In June: Mary R. Lide of the Administration Department; Donald K. Palmer of the Exchange and Trade Relations Department; Rose S. Porras of the Legal Department; and Frances G. Wichin of the Secretary's Department. In July: Elizabeth J. Cook and Enrique García, both of the Administration Department.

RESIGNATIONS. The following staff members resigned from the Fund. In June: Michael J. Kooymans, Franz Ludecke, Jeanie Muncy, Eliana D. Prebisch, and Tatsuo Yanagita. In July: Miki Eran, Ingimundur Fridriksson, Maria Cristina Spinola, and Lena Walther.

STAFF TRANSFERS. In June: Farideh Asgarzadeh, from SSG to ADM; Anna R. Cheriyan, from SSG to TRE; Jean Y. Curtis, from TRE to SSG; Norma M. Gillen, from ETR to INST; and Carolyn A. Worth, from TRE to BCS. In July: Marie Anne Ah Leong, from BUR to SSG; Lesley Allardice, from MED to BUR; Ellen K. Hnatysh, from RES to SEC; Rosemary Y. Mungul, from ADM to BUR; and Francis T.L. Tyaba, from BUR to AFR.

THE FUND HAS JUST RECEIVED A GOLD AWARD for graphics arts excellence for the second successive year.

The Government Finance Statistics Yearbook, compiled by the Bureau of Statistics, again won the top prize in the Neographics competition of the Graphics Arts Association of the Delaware Valley, which represents about 400 printers and publishers. The Yearbook, which is photocomposed by the International Computaprint Corporation of Pennsylvania, won the award in the Tabular Computer Composition category.

As a Gold Award winner, the Yearbook will once again be included in a traveling kiosk-type exhibit touring parts of Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

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