

(iii)

Former Payers

Russia and the states which formerly made up the USSR found themselves in financial difficulties immediately following the breakup of the Soviet Union and have been able to pay little since. This is an important group (11% of the budget) with a good past record, and although the situation is presumably temporary it has only added to the UN's woes.

(iv)

Non-Payers

It may come as a surprise to some that many UN member do not pay their dues or remit small token sums from time to time, allowing large backlogs of money owed the UN to accumulate over the years. While this may be understandable in the case of poorer developing countries, UN members like Brazil, Argentina and Egypt racking up years of unpaid arrears raises questions of commitment and responsibility.

Current Situation

In spite of the General Assembly's unanimous resolutions calling for payment of assessments in full and on time by member states, and regular appeals from the Secretary-General, there has been little improvement. This year (1993) only 18 out of 180 countries had paid up by January 31 (last year it was 15) providing a modest 16% of the budget. Although most of the others had followed suit by the end of the year in some form, 88 of them still owed \$500 million in past arrears, not including sums owed for peacekeeping, which are even larger. Whereas in the past the UN could finance its cash shortfall from existing reserves, these have been exhausted since the middle of 1991.

Though it is astonishing what the UN is able to do through sleight of hand to survive from day to day through internal borrowing and other emergency devices, as long as it must live from hand to mouth its budgeting will continue to earn descriptions like "almost surreal" (from former US Attorney General Richard Thornburgh after a year in the Secretariat, a comment not without irony given the predominant US role in helping to creating this state of affairs) and it will not be able live up to the hopes invested in it by the world community.

Even with a change of heart in Washington and an apparent intent to speed up their debt repayment, the problem for the UN membership at large remains one of political will, along with motivation and leadership.