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World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

Spoof on WB Technical Jargon

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These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives' holdings.

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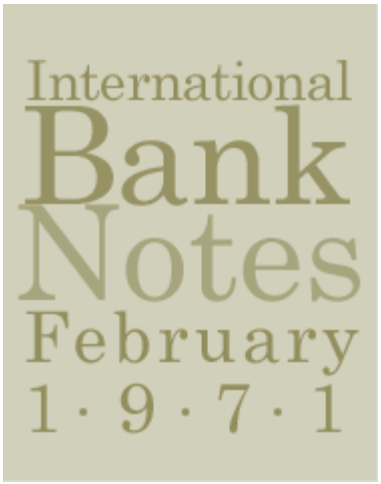
Spoof on WB Technical Jargon



In 1971, a formal memo appeared in the February 1971 edition of *International Bank Notes.* Addressed to a fictitious department head, Paul Szasz, a lawyer in the IBRD Legal Department, pens a satire spoofing the use of "Bank-ese" and the highly technical language used by staff members. The subject refers to the explosive growth in the numbers of Bank staff, a fact born out of the doubling of staff that occurred between the years 1968-1971. Szasz examines the consequences for the world at large if the World Bank grew at such high rates of growth:

Office Memorandum

To: **Director for Advanced Planning**

From: **Paul C. Szasz**

Date: **February 1, 1971**

Subject: **The Ultimate Expansion of the World Bank**

1. You have asked for an outline of the principal implications of a long-term projection of the present growth of the Bank's professional staff. The summary in Parts B-D below is therefore merely designed to identify certain matters requiring further exploration and detailed analysis by special study teams.

A. Time Scales

2. On June 30, 1968 the professional staff of the Bank stood at 741; the projected figure for the end of fiscal year 1971 is 1,417, an increase of 91%, equivalent to a compounded annual rate of about 24%. Increasing at such rate, the staff will equal the current population of the world, some 3.6 billion, in only 69 years—that is by about July 2039 (the Saturation or S Date). Even if the population, in spite of the efforts of the Population Projects Department, continues to increase at the current rate of some 2% per year, the terminal date for expanding the Bank can only be advanced by about another seven years—to August 2046.

3. Applying sensitivity analysis in respect of the two growth rates in question, and assuming variations of up to 20% in these rates (approximately one standard deviation—see Annex 1), it still appears that S Date can with over 80% assurance be bracketed for the period 2032-2066.

Paul C. Szasz

4. Though these dates may appear remote, it should be considered that the median estimated period is only half again as long as that of an IDA credit—and falls within the life span of those recently born, and perhaps even of some of our Youngest Professionals.

B. Recruitment Policies

5. The closer S Date approaches, the more it will be necessary to relax certain recruitment restrictions lest the healthy growth of our professional staff be prematurely curtailed:

a. Most serious is the anti-nepotism rule, estimated to reduce the potential adult employment pool by a factor of 4.4 (assuming for the average staff member .70 spouse, 1.40 siblings, 1.05 parents, and 1.25 children of employable age—see Annex 2); this factor would increase to about 5.8 if the restriction referred to in para. (c) were to be removed.

b. Continuing the arbitrary age limits on employment would bar some 42% of the world's population below age 18 and some 6.5% above age 65 (the normal retirement age).

Even without taking into account the empirically observed reluctance to engage women for professional positions, it is evident that the cumulative effect of the indicated restrictions reduces the employment pool to about 9% of its potential—thus necessitating an advance of S Date by over 12 years.

6. On the other hand, no change will be required in the employment of general service personnel, if present trends continue. Since the current rate in the growth of that component of the staff is somewhat under 15%, by S Date the ratio of professional to other staff will be about 388:1 (entitling each officer to the assistance of a secretary on the average of one day about every second year),

and the entire abolition of this force and its absorption into the higher category would not delay S Date by more than 4-5 days.

C. Transmutation of Internal Services

7. The absorption by the Bank staff of the entire population of the planet cannot but affect the scope and significance of certain of its internal transactions and services:

a. The Bank's budget projections, involving as they will an increasing share of the world's GNP, will gradually become the sole instrument of macroeconomic manipulation; all forms of taxation will be replaced by salary deductions and the rate of inflation will be determined by rather than influence the Bank's salary policy.

b. The Credit Union will presumably absorb and replace the existing network of banks. Aside from the Retirement Plan (see below), it will therefore constitute the sole significant market for World Bank bonds.

c. Similarly, the Staff Retirement Plan will take the place of all existing social security and insurance arrangements—but only until the reforms referred to in paras. 5(a) and (c) are implemented and S Date has been reached, for thereafter the Bank will guarantee, and indeed must insist on, cradle to grave employment for all.

d. The Messenger Service will absorb the national postal system and replace the Universal Postal Union. Extrapolating from the current speed of transmission of papers between adjoining offices, it can still be promised that transatlantic communications will continue to move considerably faster than continental drift.

e. The Bank's Press Releases, consolidated on a daily basis, will easily replace newspapers; similarly Bank Notes, Finance and Development, and the Newsletter will conveniently supplant the current excessive variety of periodical literature.

f. EDI (now WBI) and the Young Professionals Program already constitute a suitable base for the creation of a universal higher education system for the optimum training of staff members.

g. In ICSID the Bank Group already has a promising kernel of a universal judicial system; the building guards will develop into the sole police and military force,

but some concern may be expressed in the slow growth of the Legal Department, which at its current puny 10% rate of expansion will by S Date only be able to staff the bar of a medium size country.

D. External Impact

8. Corresponding to or paralleling certain of these basically internal changes, consideration must be given to the interaction of the special needs of the Bank and the "outside economy":

a. The Bank's reluctance to take responsibility for commodity price stabilization may wane, when this can be accomplished merely by adjusting the menus of its Cafeteria.

b. Ecological considerations may necessitate a reduction in the output of paper per project (Annex 3), should the Agriculture Projects Department determine that reforestation cannot be implemented at a sufficient rate.

c. Finally, well before S Date the Population and Education Projects Departments should consider the optimum genetic makeup and environmental background of staff members; how to breed international employees and to train bureaucrats from the nursery.

Should developments continue as here projected, a special commemoration may well become appropriate for the centennial of the Bretton Woods Conference. On that auspicious date we may cease to talk of the World Bank—and welcome instead the Bank World.