

8 January 1958

FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU (4 January 1958)

Bang-Jensen is keeping his word - A Danish member of the U.N. Secretariat in conflict with his official duty (by Walter Bauer-Heyd, Copenhagen)

A firm tin soldier as from Andersen's tales is the country-man of the Danish author of fairy-tales, Povl Bang-Jensen. Some are calling him Don Quixote for his fight against the sails of the windmill of the administrative bureaucracy in the glass palace of the United Nations. Bang-Jensen is a diplomat who has been working for the past eight years in the Political Department of the U.N. Secretariat, or rather was working because Mr. Hammarskjold has suspended him three weeks ago for insubordination. Until the clearance of the case - he was told - he cannot enter the building of the United Nations, and, to lay stress upon this order, he was taken out from his office by two strong guards and escorted outside of the building.

The reason for this drastic action, which caused a great sensation in Danish public opinion, was Mr. Bang-Jensen's persistent refusal to hand over to Mr. Hammarskjold "all official documents which are in his (Bang-Jensen's) possession, for safe-keeping in the Secretariat". As Bang-Jensen irrefutably stated, at issue is only one single document containing the names of 81 Hungarian witnesses whose names are known only to him and whom Bang-Jensen, in his capacity as Secretary of the United Nations Committee on Hungary, interrogated in connection with the events in Hungary in October-November 1956. Bang-Jensen gave his word to those witnesses who were afraid of reprisals on members of their families who remained in Hungary, that their names would not be disclosed to any member of the U.N. Secretariat, among whom are also citizens of Soviet Russia and other Communist countries.

One can now subsequently argue whether Bang-Jensen was entitled to make such a promise, but since the Hungarian Committee, as its Chairman, the former Danish Minister Alsing Andersen admitted, did not give any clear instructions about the procedure of taking testimony from witnesses, Bang-Jensen could have the subjective feeling to be entitled to act as he has acted.

That Mr. Hammarskjold, at least to a certain degree, is sharing Bang-Jensen's concern, can be seen from his statement according to which the list will be kept in absolute safety as it is the case with other secret documents of the U.N. But Bang-Jensen is not satisfied with this. The question is not only the safe-keeping of the list of names but also that he has given his word of honor to the Hungarian refugees promising them to respect their anonymity and to tell nobody their names. Bang-Jensen feels bound by his word and is therefore refusing to give up the list without expressly defined permission. Mr. Hammarskjold in return says that the piece of paper containing the 81 names belongs legally to the U.N. and a refusal to hand it over must mean consequently a violation of his duties as an official of the U.N.



To find a way out from the dilemma, the Chairman of the Hungarian Committee suggested that the document should be burnt in Mr. Hammarskjold's and Bang-Jensen's presence but the question was rejected by the other members of the Committee for legal reasons. The U.N. Secretariat possesses no means to force Bang-Jensen to give up the document. Should he still stick to his refusal, the unpleasant case will end with a decision of a three-member investigating committee that the young diplomat must be dismissed from his post; Bang-Jensen in his conflict with his conscience stood between obedience and his word of honor, which he had given to those who trusted him.