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LAKE SUCCESS.—Soviet Delegate Andrei Y. Vishinsky was in rare form, ripping out Russian at top speed in a speech to a tense political committee of the United Nations. Suddenly the U. N. interpreter faltered, stopped and broke down. He could not go on.

There was immediate consternation. Dmitri Z. Manuilsky, Soviet Ukrainian Foreign Minister, begged his old comrade Vishinsky to slow up a bit. The U. N. staff frantically waved to a woman in the audience to go into the interpreter's booth. She had just arrived to take a job on the staff.

Vishinsky started again, picking up speed as he went along. The interpreter followed him accurately and speedily. He drank a glass of water. She did, too. He banged the table. So did she. He clenched his fists and waved his arms. She did likewise. Soon delegates and onlookers were watching her performance rather than listening to Vishinsky.

When Vishinsky finished, several crowded around his interpreter and congratulated her.

That unhappy day—in the 1947 General Assembly—was the only time the specially picked U. N. interpreting staff ever has broken down. The woman, nameless by U. N. rules, still is on the staff, but the job of translating the hot-tempered Soviet delegate, now Foreign Minister, has been won by George Sherry, Romanian-born graduate of City College, New York. He is what people call a born linguist.

Sherry's high point with Vishinsky so far was when he translated the Soviet delegate's attack on the so-called warmongers in the 1947 General Assembly.

Vishinsky was loud, as usual, but Sherry's voice sometimes rose to almost hysterical heights. People forgot they were listening to an interpretation and thought they were hearing Vishinsky himself. The attack provoked one Congressman, Emanuel Celler (D., N. Y.), to boos in the press gallery, and it stands out as one of the most violent speeches in any U. N. meeting.

Boss Draws $11,000

THE staff of 60-odd U. N. interpreters makes it a rule to expect the unexpected. They never know what will come up next.

Salaries range from $5450 to $10,900 in annual take-home pay. The director, soft-spoken Georges Rabinovitch, native of Switzerland, gets $11,000 net. In addition, they get a living allowance and a rent adjustment. They figure they could do better as free-lance interpreters, Rabinovitch says, what with so many international conferences going on, but they stay on because they believe in the U. N. and love their work.

The interpreters have their troubles as well as their fun. They have to bone up before every meeting to be sure they know what the delegates will talk about. Even then, they sometimes get rattled. Here is an example, but again the U. N. prefers that the interpreter go nameless. Rabinovitch explains that they are temperamental, like actors, and he'd rather not have any singled out as stars.

In the early days of the Commission for the Reduction and Regulation of Conventional Armaments, an interpreter got mixed up and said: "The Commission for Reduction and Regulation of Arguments."

Andrei A. Gromyko, Soviet delegate, who was speaking, unbent and laughed at that one. He and several other delegates agreed the interpreter might have had the right idea. At the end of the meeting, Gromyko got the floor on a point of order and congratulated the rattled interpreter on his over-all job.

That was the only time an interpreter here won a compliment from Gromyko, who usually is a stickler for the exact shading of meaning on each word. It also got the man a raise.

Then there was a time V. M. Molotov burped during a major speech. Molotov, former Soviet Foreign Minister, came to the U. N. Assembly here in 1946. He spoke in a slow, even style, sometimes waving his cigarette, but his delivery was almost colorless. Late one night, at a meeting on disarmament, Molotov suddenly burped.

Gromyko, following his boss' speech looked startled. U. N. attaches who understood Russian looked disconcerted—but others thought Molotov's burp was pure Russian. Molotov's personal interpreter, Vladimir Pavlow, who is at the Russian Embassy in London, did not translate the burp in this case.

Wisecracks a Specialty

THE U. N. frowns on gestures and stage acting in interpreting, which used to be one of the tricks of the trade. The woman who tackled Vishinsky did not agree with that ruling, but has had to cut down on her gestures. Even so, interpreters can be seen waving their arms and getting excited when the going gets hot.

Rabinovitch says the requirements are strict and the pace is hard. It isn't an eight-hour day, 40-hour a week job. Interpreters must have:

1. Good knowledge of languages, naturally. They must be able to translate proverbs and witty remarks on split-second notice.

2. Good educational background, college trained, preferably with some legal knowledge.

3. Good public speaking ability.

4. Strong self-control. They must carry on at long meetings when everyone is practically on the ropes, but must never crack. They must never let their personal views slip in.

There are 16 United States citizens on the payroll, but almost no pure Americans. Most are naturalized and many are of Russian origin. Rabinovitch says Anglo-Saxons generally are not good interpreters because they do not have command of languages

THERE are two types of interpretation at the U. N. One is called consecutive interpretation. It is the style used in the old days.

For example, every speech must be heard in French and English, the working languages. When the Russians speak, an interpreter takes notes, makes symbols, relies on his memory and translates it into English. When he is finished, another interpreter gives the French version.

Thus an hour's speech in Russian in the Security Council can stretch into three hours. The Security Council still insists on consecutive translations, so the delegates can think up what they want to say while a translation is being made.

The new method used everywhere else is called simultaneous translation. A delegate makes his speech and interpreters sitting in five booths translate him as he talks. If a Russian speaks, the Russian interpreter rests while the English, French, Spanish and Chinese interpreters handle his speech.

Simultaneous interpretation came into its own during the Nuernberg war crimes trials and was put into operation here when the trials ended. Some say it saves time, but others disagree. For a while, consecutive interpreters—the old-timers—feuded with the new system, vowing they never would step foot in a booth. But gradually they were won over and they are all one happy family now.