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U.N. Chief Rejects Soviet Defector's Job Plea

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UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., Jan. 3 — Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar has rejected a request from a Soviet defector, supported by the United States, that he be allowed to stay on his job in the United Nations Secretariat while he awaits American citizenship.

The defector, Vladimir Yakimetz, was granted political asylum last February. He was the first Soviet defector to request that he be allowed to keep his job at the United Nations, where he worked in a middle-level position in the Department of International and Social Affairs.

The Yakimetz case has been of concern to the United States Mission here, which has urged in meetings with Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar over the last several months that Mr. Yakimetz be allowed to retain his post in the Secretariat.

A bill being sponsored by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, that would grant Mr. Yakimetz American citizenship is expected to be adopted in Congress in the next few weeks. In the meantime, the United States has argued that Mr. Yakimetz should be considered a stateless person and that his employment contract, which expired last Saturday, should be extended pending his grant of citizenship.

Senior United Nations officials said today that Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had decided that Mr. Yakimetz, as a defector, could not be considered a stateless person. Thus, although he was allowed to remain in his job through the length of his contract, his contract cannot be extended.

Officials in the Secretariat said that, in effect, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar felt that to grant the request of Mr. Yakimetz

and the Americans would turn the matter into an East-West issue and that that would be harmful to the United Nations.

"We didn't extend it because we can't," Emilio Olivares, a senior aide to Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, said of the Yakimetz contract.

Mr. Olivares said that that by Soviet law, Mr. Yakimetz remains a Soviet citizen despite his defection. Moreover, like all Soviet employees of the Secretariat, he was officially "seconded" from his home Government. In diplomatic parlance, that means Soviet officials at the United Nations are temporarily transferred to the United Nations from positions in their own Government. United Nations employees of other countries are normally private citizens and not members of their government when they come to work at the United Nations.

To have the contract extended, Mr. Olivares said, Soviet consent was essential. But, he said, "the Soviets refused."

Mr. Olivares added that the Yakimetz case was not officially closed and that he could be considered for a new contract after he gains American citizenship. He added, however, that even with American sponsorship it would be politically difficult for Mr. Yakimetz to return to his job if the Soviet Government opposes him.

The United States chief delegate to the United Nations, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, said in a telephone interview that she "greatly regrets" the decision not to grant Mr. Yakimetz an extension.

"If the U.N. Secretariat is to operate on the basis of merit and not simply function as a political spoils system," she said, "employees have the right to be judged through normal procedures on the basis of their performance."

The American mission is believed to regard Mr. Yakimetz case as important because it illustrates the extent of control that the Soviet Union has over its nationals working in the Secretariat. The Americans argue privately that the practice by which Soviet citizens are "seconded" to the Secretariat in effect makes them remain employees of their own Government subject to hiring and dismissal by the Soviet Union rather than by the personnel department of the Secretariat.

American officials are believed to object to the Secretariat's acceptance of this practice, contending that it violates the United Nations Charter.