

The Bank, the U.N., and Shirley Boskey

by Thierry Sagnier

Few people at the Bank could boast of a career as long and distinguished as that of Shirley Boskey, Director of the International Relations Department (IRD), in the Office of the Vice President, External Relations.

Mrs. Boskey, who retired January 31, was with the institution since 1954, a total of 29 years. What makes her situation unusual is that these 29 years were all spent with the same department.

"The name of the Department has changed three times since I joined," she says. "When I came to the Bank, it was called Technical Assistance and Liaison Staff, then Technical Assistance and Planning, next Development Services Department, and it was finally named International Relations in 1973. I'm still not sure that's the best title, or that it adequately describes the work the Department does."

Another reason Mrs. Boskey may be singled out is that she was the first woman Department Director in the Bank. She recalls that the draft press release announcing her appointment in December 1975 highlighted this fact and was summarily changed by Robert McNamara, then President of the Bank. He said he didn't want that in because "that's not why she was picked."

Now, she is quick to dampen any praise, saying, "I got my job through longevity and because I was there."

Be that as it may, Mrs. Boskey, a lawyer who came from the U.S. Interior Department, took part in drafting the charters of the IDA and IFC, helped set up the Eco-



Shirley Boskey

Photo by Giuseppe Franchini

nomie Development Institute (EDI), and was one of the group of Bank staff which first considered the possibilities of multilateral investment insurance. "I used to have one foot in the Legal Department," she says.

The principal change she has seen over the years in her area of work is in the Bank's relationship to the United Nations. "I remind anyone who will listen that the Bank is a specialized agency of the United Nations. But for many years, the Bank remained a distant relative. Now, we have very close working relationships with other agencies of the U.N. system, on all levels. I've always felt it a necessity that there be association and understanding between the Bank and the U.N., because through understanding and cooperation comes support.

"But," she adds, "I certainly didn't bring about the change by myself, or even initiate it. It began with the hard work of the two prior

Directors of the International Relations Department, Richard Demuth and later Michael Hoffman. I'm sure the effort will continue with my successor, Javed Burki."

With almost three decades of work at the Bank, Mrs. Boskey has wide-ranging memories. "It goes very fast. In the beginning, I think there was more variety. What you did on Day 1 was different from what you did on Day 2," she says. "And the Bank was so much smaller. I remember when there was only one Christmas party for the whole Bank, held in one room at the Mayflower. And if you saw someone you didn't know in the cafeteria, you simply assumed he was with the International Finance Corporation."

Mrs. Boskey is not yet certain what the future holds. "I knew you'd ask me that," she laughs. "I really don't know what I'm going to do. But something will turn up." She pauses, laughs again. "I'm sure there's life after IRD." ■