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The Durable Thant

Despite the vehemence with which U Thant had earlier rejected any suggestion that he stay on as secretary general, few will be really surprised at his decision to remain.

There was always something a little less than definitive about Thant's determination to leave the U.N. And there was a good deal of pressure built up among U.N. members to keep him on the job.

This pressure did not, in the end, mean any genuine concessions to Thant's feelings of frustration over his job. Very little of substance has changed in respect to the litany of complaints he made about the failure of the big powers to cooperate in making the world organization work and the secretary generalship less of a purely administrative function.

The plain fact is that Thant was not so essential to the U.N. as to make any major power shift its stand on basic issues in order to keep him in office. But the prospect of a long, bruising fight over his successor was ominous enough to make it well worth while to placate him in any way short of such fundamental changes.

So Thant will stay on, and the U.N. will struggle along in much its usual crabwise fashion, hoping to moderate where it cannot cure the political ailments of the world.

Everyone will wish him luck. The U.N. is still a living, albeit battered, symbol of a world of law, and U Thant is devoted to making it more effective. Besides, he will need all the luck he can get in his thankless and grueling post.