

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

SUB-COMMISSION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OF THE PRESS

SECOND SESSION

STATEMENT MADE BY THE DELEGATION OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST
REPUBLICS REFERRED TO THE SUB-COMMISSION FOR ITS INFORMATION
BY THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

At its Fifth Session the Economic and Social Council considered the Report of the First Session of the Sub-Commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press (document E/441). Chapter III of this Report "Agenda of the Conference - Provisional Draft Agenda" was referred by the Council to its Social Committee. A statement made to the Social Committee by the Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is contained in document E/AC.7/30*.

Upon the recommendation of the Social Committee, the Council resolved:

"THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

(a) REFERS document E/AC.7/30, (statement made by the delegation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) to the Sub-Commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press, for its information."

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* Document E/AC.7/30 is reproduced as Annex A of this Document

ANNEX A

The Soviet delegation hereby declares itself to be in agreement with the convocation of an international conference to discuss questions relating to the freedom of the press and of information, with the participation of States Members of the United Nations, of other democratic States and of a number of international social organizations.

With regard to the report under discussion and the proposals of the United Nations Sub-Commission appointed to study questions relating to the press and to information, the delegation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has a number of remarks to make in connection with these proposals.

In the first place, it should be pointed out that no definition is given in these proposals of the tasks of the press and of information, a clear definition of which is of great importance.

It is well known to everyone that hotbeds of Fascism still survive and that there are influential reactionary forces in the world which are sympathetic to defeated Fascism. These forces obstruct the establishment of a lasting peace and systematically propagate enmity between the peoples of the United Nations and another war. For this purpose, they are making wise use of all methods of information - the press, radio and the cinema, which in most countries, are in the hands of a small group of monopolists, who use these methods of information, especially the press, to impose their reactionary, anti-democratic ideas on nations. The press can only fulfil its lofty duties if it fights for the principles of democracy and for the extirpation of Fascist ideology in all its forms and if it serves the cause of ensuring universal peace and security and the development of friendly relations between nations on the basis of respect for their independence, for equal rights and for the principle of the self-determination of peoples.

The proposal made to the Sub-Commission by the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formulated in that very spirit. This proposal, which unfortunately did not meet with the approval of the majority of the Sub-Commission, merits the most serious attention in defining the tasks of the press and of information in the fight for international peace and the security of nations.

It is also important to determine correctly the actual principle of the freedom of the press. This means, in the first place, that it is essential to recognize that freedom of the press is the right of all citizens, with the exception of persons engaged in any form of Fascist propaganda or in propagating aggression. Experience has shown that Fascists always and everywhere use the press as a weapon for the destruction of democracy, for preaching racial hatred, for bellicose policy and for attacking other
/countries.

countries. Hence, the cause of democracy is incompatible with allowing Fascists to use the press and other methods of information for their nefarious political purposes. In the second place, it must be admitted that merely to proclaim the principle of freedom of the press does not in itself give this freedom to the people, unless large sections of the population and their organizations have at their disposal the material resources without which freedom of the press cannot be made a practical reality.

Everybody knows that, since a newspaper, if it is to survive, requires the investment of vast funds which are not possessed by the bulk of the population, the freedom of the press proclaimed in constitutions becomes in actual fact the privilege of a few newspaper owners, publishing houses and telegraph agencies. For instance, in the United States of America and in Great Britain, it is essential to possess tens of millions in order to be able to establish a big newspaper capable of survival. It is obvious that in such countries freedom of the press really exists only for a few people. Numerous facts also show that the dependence of the press, the cinema and the radio on private proprietors, pursuing their own narrow interests, places honest journalists and other workers in the field of information in a difficult position, undermines the morale of journalists and leads to widespread corruption. Such a situation requires decisive remedial measures.

Of course, the complete guarantee of freedom of the press for the people is the communal ownership of means of information. This is the only way to ensure access of the broader masses of the people to methods of information and their effective control by democratic and peace-loving organizations. Such a guarantee has been fully realized in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, there are possibilities in all democratic States for combating the use of the press and other methods of information for anti-democratic purposes and for the fight for honest and truthful information.

Now as never before, the nations of the world are interested in the wide diffusion of really honest and objective information, which can substantially promote the mutual understanding and friendship of the nations. The **delegation** of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics agrees that one of the conditions for achieving this objective would be to give correspondents of newspapers, telegraph agencies and radio companies the privileges necessary for the successful accomplishment of their task, both at home and abroad.

The concrete definition of the rights and duties of foreign correspondents of telegraph agencies, newspapers and radio companies is naturally a sovereign prerogative of each individual State. It would be wrong, however, to raise the question only of the rights and of the freedom
/of organs

of organs of information and their correspondents. Rights should be counterbalanced by duties. Freedom also presupposes responsibility. Without definite obligations and responsibilities freedom of information may, and in practice frequently does, turn into freedom of non-information.

In the Soviet Union and in certain other countries the press is responsible to democratic social organizations. In those countries, however, where the arbitrary rule of private capitalist proprietors of newspapers, cinema trusts and radio companies holds sway, it is urgently essential to establish by law strict responsibility for the dissemination of mendacious and libellous information about other peoples and States. The necessity for introducing such democratic legislation is proved by the regularly recurring cases of the dissemination, for instance, by certain American and British newspapers and agencies of malicious fabrications, frequently with the obvious purpose of aggravating relations between countries.

On the basis of the above statement, the Delegation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics submits the following proposal for the consideration of the United Nations Economic and Social Council:

I. To propose the following agenda for the International Conference:

1. The duties of the press and information services in the campaign for international peace and security;
2. The general principles of freedom of the press and information;
3. The rights and duties of organs of the press and information;
4. Measures to combat the spreading of false and libellous information.

II. To recommend the International Conference to take the following considerations as a basis in discussing the various items of the agenda.

A. On the question of "The duties of the press and information services in the campaign for international peace and security".

1. Organization of a campaign for democratic principles, for unmasking the vestiges of Fascism and for eradicating all forms of Fascist ideology.
2. The unmasking of warmongers and the organization of an effective campaign against organs of the press and information which incite to war and aggression.
3. The development of friendly relations between nations on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, equality and self-determination of peoples.
4. Co-operation in the solution of economic, social and humanitarian problems, as well as in developing the respect for human rights and basic freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

/B. On the question

B. On the question of "The general principles of freedom of the press and information".

1. To recognize freedom of the press as the right of all citizens, with the exception of persons engaging in any form of Fascist propaganda.
2. To consider that complete freedom of the press and information can only be assured if the wider masses of the population and their organizations are given the material resources necessary for publishing organs of the press and for operating other channels of information.
3. In countries where organs of the press are directly dependent on private proprietors and their commercial interests, to consider it essential to take effective steps to eliminate and prevent the practice of giving direct or indirect bribes to organs of the press and information for the purpose of distorting the truth.

C. On the question of "The rights and obligations of organs of the press and information".

1. To consider it necessary in the interests of disseminating reliable information to give telegraph agencies, radio companies and newspapers the right of extensive access to sources of information and means of communication both at home and abroad - within the limits compatible with the interests of State security: "
2. To consider it essential to frame measures which would ensure increasingly wide circulation for really reliable and objective information.

D. On the question of "Measures to combat the spreading of false and libellous information".

1. In conformity with the postulate that freedom presupposes responsibility to recommend the adoption of legislation which will bring effective pressure on owners of such organs of the press and information as spread false and libellous information regarding other peoples and States.

The severest action should be taken in the case of false information which leads the public astray with the object of worsening relations between nations, or provoking conflicts and inciting to war.

/III. (a) To approve

- III. (a) To approve the Sub-Committee's proposal that participation in the Conference on Freedom of Information should not be confined to Member States of the United Nations and that non-member States, invited to the Conference, should be given full right of participation and the right to vote;
- (b) That, in addition to the countries invited to the World Health Conference, the list of non-member States invited to the Conference on Freedom of Information and the Press should include the Mongolian People's Republic.
