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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF
THE COUNCIL AND ITS COMMISSIONS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FOURTH MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York,
on Wednesday, 11 April 1951, at 2.30 p.m.

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Chairman: Mr. SANTA CRUZ

President of the Economic and
Social Council

Members:

Mr. BRENNAN

Australia

Mr. ALMEIDA

Brazil

Mr. CHANG

China

Mr. DEVINAT

France

Mr. RAJAN

India

Mr. CHERNYSHEV

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Mr. CORLEY SMITH

United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

Mr. LUBIN

United States of America

Representative of a specialized agency:

Mr. HILL

World Health Organization (WHO)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Category A:

Mr. BROPHY

International Confederation of
Free Trade Unions

Category B:

Mr. PENCE

World's Alliance of Young Men's
Christian Associations

Secretariat:

Mr. OWEN

Assistant Secretary-General in charge
of the Department of Economic
Affairs

Mr. YATES

Secretary of the Economic and Social
Council

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL (General Assembly resolution 409 (V),
E/AC.34/1, E/AC.34/2, E/AC.34/3, E/AC.34/4, E/AC.34/5, E/AC.34/5/Add.1,
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E/AC.34/11, E/AC.34/13, E/AC.34/14, E/AC.34/15, E/AC.34/16) (continued)

Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) wished to know the views of other representatives regarding the United Kingdom proposals on the reorganization of the Council's work. It was difficult to avoid an accumulation of items toward the end of the year, especially when the agenda was heavy. The possibility should, therefore, be studied of distributing the Council's work over the period between the end of one session of the General Assembly and the beginning of the next, lest it should become necessary to hold 200 meetings in a single session, as might well be the case at the following session of the Council. An effort should be made to deal with the greatest possible number of questions before the summer, in order to try at least to prevent an accumulation of work towards the end of the year. He would not make a formal proposal on that point, but pointed out that such a method would have the double advantage of spreading the work over the whole year, and of dividing it into categories, so that experts would not waste their time waiting for the Council to consider a question in their field. The result would be a considerable saving of funds -- an important though not a vital consideration -- as well as time, and the Council would be able to do better work.

/The work

The work could be organized early in the year, at a first session which might be held, say in mid-January. The Council could then devote a week or ten days to the consideration of immediate problems, especially those of a procedural character, arising from resolutions adopted shortly before by the General Assembly. Such current matters could be dealt with by permanent representatives alone. The presence of experts would be required only for the second part of the session, when specific technical questions in the social field were examined. Such a method would without increasing the number of meetings, make it unnecessary for the experts to stand by until their services were needed. Thus, social questions would be considered at a definite date fixed in advance. In March or April there would be a session devoted wholly to the consideration of economic problems, or better still, of the economic problem which was the focal point of the Council's work for the year, thus lightening the agenda of the summer session. He emphasized the need to devote one whole session to economic problems. While he was aware that the summer session's agenda was always extremely heavy, the Council's task would be that much easier if important problems could be dealt with in the spring. Even if that method were followed, however, the Council's session immediately preceding that of the General Assembly would still have a crowded agenda, as at that time the Council would have to deal with questions of co-ordination and examine the reports of specialized agencies and commissions; there too, however, it might be possible to divide the work according to subjects and to fix in advance the dates for their consideration. In any case, he explained that the time-table he had outlined was quite tentative and in no way represented a final or inviolable plan.

Mr. RUBIN (United States of America) stressed the fact that the United Kingdom proposals were not basically different from those of the United States. The United States note provided for meetings of the Council's Committees between sessions of the Council to make a preliminary study of the various questions, examine documents and approve resolutions which the Council would then only have to adopt. Such a method would greatly ease the Council's task and enable representatives who did not agree with a Committee's conclusions to present their views again in plenary meeting. The United Kingdom, for its part,

/ proposed more

proposed more frequent sessions of the Council. He thought, however, that those proposals would not prevent the Council from referring the examination of certain questions to the Economic Committee or from setting up subsidiary organs, so that it would not have to deal with all questions in plenary meetings. He felt that both the proposals of the United Kingdom and those contained in the United States note should solve the problem in that they would enable the Council to expedite the study of the questions before it, to raise the quality of its work while lightening the task of each representative, and to avoid the repeated examination of questions that could be dealt with on first consideration.

No guarantee could be given, however, that the Council would be able to count on precisely the experts needed for any given question. The United States delegation had felt that if the technical work were done in the Committees and the Council could confine itself to the more formal policy decisions, the level of representation at plenary sessions might be raised.

According to the United Kingdom representative, if the date when a subject was to be considered were known in advance, Governments would be able to send more responsible representatives to the Council's sessions. Experience alone would show which method would best achieve the desired result. He would, however, be prepared to agree to the method proposed by the United Kingdom provided that it was regarded as an experiment and that if the results were not satisfactory, other methods would be used.

Mr. BRENNAN (Australia) had heard with interest the United Kingdom representative's proposals. His Government had envisaged two sessions of the Council, preceded or followed by meetings of the Council's committees. He could see room for compromise between that proposal and the suggestion made by the United Kingdom representative. The Australian Government would, however, prefer the Council's first session to be held not in January, but at the beginning of February at the earliest. Otherwise, as the General Assembly usually ended its session just before Christmas, Governments would have very little time -- a fortnight at most -- to assemble the necessary documents, to constitute the delegations and to give them the necessary instruction.

Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) said that his proposals were very general and sketchy, that he had not had time to consider in detail how they were to be applied and that it mattered little whether the Council's first session were held at the beginning of February or at the end of January. Furthermore, the arrangement he had suggested was in the nature of an experiment.

Mr. CHANG (China) was happy to note that the Ad Hoc Committee was making satisfactory progress which should lead to concrete and positive results.

The United Kingdom proposals had the great advantage of following up ideas which had been considered for some time and of developing them to their logical conclusion. First, those proposals recognized the need to reclassify according to subject all the questions with which the Council dealt, thus doing away with the present confusion, which involved serious loss of time on the part of experts who were frequently obliged to wait several days for the discussion of their particular item, resulted in more work for the Council, and impaired the quality of that work. Such an idea deserved further study. The same applied to the suggestion that some sessions of the Council should be devoted to current matters and others to the study of questions of policy. It was highly desirable that the latter sessions should be attended by eminent personalities.

The questions of policy fell into three categories: social affairs, economic affairs and co-ordination. That being so, the Council might hold three sessions a year devoted to the study of those basic questions or of related problems. Each session should last no longer than three weeks, especially if the Council desired high level representation of the various Governments. The various items would therefore have to be thoroughly prepared and the necessary documentation assembled before the opening of each session. One session would be devoted to a social question, the second to an economic question and the third to a question of co-ordination. The three sessions together would take about nine weeks.

/The Council

The Council might use the few remaining weeks to deal with current matters more adequately than it had as yet been able to do; for instance, it might make a more thorough examination of the reports submitted to it.

The Council might meet early in the year, around 25 January or 2 February, for two or three weeks in the course of which it would concentrate on procedural matters and plan its work. It would then hold a three or four-week session devoted to the consideration of a basic question in the social field or of related problems. That session would be followed by a period of preparatory work. Then, towards the middle of April, the Council would meet for three weeks to deal with a definite economic problem. Its following session, which would take two or three weeks, would be reserved for current matters. Finally, at a last session, which would take three or four weeks, the Council would examine a special co-ordination problem. To sum up, the Council would hold three sessions devoted to specific questions of principle, to which Governments would send representatives specially selected in accordance with the subject discussed. Those sessions would be followed by a period devoted to routine matters, with which the permanent representatives would deal. At sessions devoted to questions of policy or to specific problems, the Council would have to meet once or twice a day, while during the other sessions, three or four meetings a week would suffice.

Where the structure of the Council and its Commissions was concerned, the general debate had shown that the Council had too many functional commissions. It would appear that some of them could easily be abolished.

In conclusion, the Chinese delegation agreed with the United States and United Kingdom representatives that the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations on the re-organization of the Council and its Commissions should be experimental in character; they should provide for a trial period of three years, which alone could show the advantages and drawbacks of the new system.

Mr. CHERNYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) took it that the Ad Hoc Committee was discussing the concrete question of the organization and operation of the Council itself. On that point, the Committee had before it

/not only

not only the United Kingdom proposals, but a series of proposals submitted by the United States, Canada, France, and others.

At the preceding meeting, the USSR delegation had made concrete proposals on that subject, reducing the number of the Council's sessions to one a year. Those proposals deserved the Committee's attention.

Moreover, the USSR delegation could not support the United Kingdom proposals, under which the Council would apparently hold as many sessions as necessary, so that it would tend to be permanently in operation; the effect on the quality of its work could only be deleterious. Under present conditions, at the end of a session delegations had a fairly accurate knowledge of the questions to be discussed at the following session. In other words, the Governments had time to examine those questions and to take a stand on them in the intervening period. They would be largely denied that opportunity if the United Kingdom proposal were adopted. Lastly, while the Security Council must, because of the nature of its work, be in permanent session, that was not true of the Economic and Social Council, which dealt with an entirely different field and consequently operated on a different basis.

Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) wished to know the duration of the single session proposed by the USSR delegation, the number of meetings that would be held, and when and where it would take place.

Mr. CHERNYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said it was rather difficult to answer those questions ~~off-hand~~. Everything would depend on what other changes were made in the organization and operation of the Council and its commissions. If, for example, the USSR proposals on the re-organization of the Council's work were adopted, the Council's agenda would be considerably lightened as it would then consist of only a limited number of basic items relating primarily to economic and social co-operation. Indeed, if all the less important items or items falling within the competence of other United Nations organs were removed from the Council's agenda, the duration of the session could be reduced to approximately one month.

/As regards

As regards the place of the Council's sessions, he saw no reason why the Council should necessarily meet at Headquarters. Experience had shown Geneva to be eminently suited to Council meetings. The United States and United Kingdom proposals on the matter seemed to be lacking in objectivity and not to take all the aspects of the situation into account. At any rate, he thought that the question should be dealt with by the Council rather than by the Ad Hoc Committee.

Mr. DEVINAT (France) noted that all proposals, verbal and written, made in the Committee tended to improve in various ways the organization of the work of the Council and its commissions.

There was no doubt that such improvements could be made in various ways and that at least two main types of measures could be taken.

First, measures could be taken to relieve the burden of work which the members of the Council had to cope with in any given year. It was generally recognized that the Council's sessions were becoming increasingly long and arduous. The amount of work allotted to the Council should therefore be reduced. The Ad Hoc Committee had heard interesting suggestions in that regard. The French memorandum (E/AC.34/10) for example proposed that the work of the Council should be more thoroughly prepared by subsidiary organs and by the Secretariat as well as by the Governments of Member States themselves. There was no doubt that much could be done along those lines. Improvement of working methods alone would not of course yield the desired result. Nevertheless, it was a highly important aspect of the question, perhaps the most important that the Ad Hoc Committee could consider.

Secondly, methods could be devised to ensure a better distribution of the Council's work through the year. That was the aim of most of the suggestions made at the current meeting.

The work could be divided up in several ways. It could, for example, be divided according to subject-matter, all social questions being considered at one session, all economic questions at another, and so on. That method would have the advantage of calling the experts away from their work for no longer than was absolutely necessary. On the other hand, the work could also be divided up according to the Council's duties. At the beginning of the year,

/the Council

the Council had to fulfil certain tasks following on the General Assembly resolutions; it had to take decisions and to refer to its subsidiary organs or to the Secretariat work called for by the General Assembly. Later in the year, it had to draw up its report to the General Assembly -- which necessitated prior examination of the reports of its subsidiary organs and of specialized agencies -- and to formulate certain recommendations to the General Assembly.

The best solution would be to make use of both methods. Indeed, the first could not be applied to its full extent. Thus, it might not be advisable to group all social questions together at the beginning of the year before the reports of the commissions concerned became available. On the other hand, it would be equally illogical to adhere strictly to a distribution by functions; that was more or less what the Council had been obliged to do so far, and the results left much to be desired. It would be best to maintain the two work periods of the Council during the year: one in summer and one in winter, and to distribute the various tasks of the Council between the two on the basis of the suggestions made in the Ad Hoc Committee.

The proposal had been made to examine, say, all social questions at one session of the Council. To devote two separate sessions to social and economic items respectively would be to run counter to the principle of the interdependence of economic and social questions, as expressed in the Charter. It should be pointed out in that connexion that to induce Governments to send eminent personalities to represent them, grouping the questions together was far less important than determining well beforehand the date on which each main question of principle would be discussed. In other words, what mattered was not the distribution of the Council's work over several short sessions but its preparation longer in advance, on the basis of a more definite schedule, so that it would be clearly known at what time in each session the main questions of principle would be discussed.

In conclusion, he emphasized that his suggestions were not in direct contradiction to the other suggestions made, but that they were not as far-reaching. The French delegation felt that it should be possible to improve the organization and operation of the Council within its traditional pattern without making any basic alterations in it.

/Mr. ALMEIDA

Mr. ALMEIDA (Brazil) stressed that his delegation had at first been very much in favour of the United States proposal to provide for meetings of the Social and Economic Committees between the Council sessions. He had thought that that method could solve some of the Council's problems. The Brazilian delegation had not then considered the possibility of increasing the number of plenary sessions of the Council. The United Kingdom proposal which contained provisions to that effect seemed well worth while and would certainly help to solve the problems arising from the fact that the Council lacked time to deal adequately with all the items on its agenda.

It went without saying that all proposals made in the Ad Hoc Committee as well as the latter's recommendations to the Economic and Social Council would be only tentative and would have to be tried out in practice during the three years to come.

The CHAIRMAN noted that the Council had been accused on the one hand of undertaking too much work simultaneously and thus dissipating its efforts and on the other of rushing through its work, thus making the task of delegations and of the Secretariat more difficult. The Council and the General Assembly had already adopted measures to remedy that state of affairs and had emphasized in their resolutions that the resources devoted to the economic and social work of the United Nations should be concentrated on tasks of primary importance.

There could be no doubt that the methods of work hitherto followed by the Council and its commissions had not led to the desired results. The Council's summer session in particular had been so over-loaded that the Council had been forced to do its work in a perfunctory fashion and had failed to carry out one of its main tasks, namely to co-ordinate the work programmes of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies.

To remedy the shortcomings in the existing organization it must first be recognized that, far from limiting its activities, the Council should work harder or longer than in the past.

Various suggestions had already been put forward to overcome the drawbacks of the present system, for example, that questions in committees should be more thoroughly prepared and that special meetings should be called on matters of current interest. They should be examined with care.

/When that

When that examination was undertaken, certain factors, particularly the needs of delegations themselves, must be borne in mind. In drafting his proposals for re-organization, the representative of the United Kingdom might have adopted the point of view of large delegations which had many experts at their disposal. It must nevertheless be considered that numerically small delegations which were now making a great effort to send two or three representatives to Council sessions once or twice a year would probably experience considerable difficulty in being represented if the Council decided to sit permanently or to increase the number of its sessions.

The quality of the work accomplished must also be borne in mind and it must be realized that it depended on the one hand on the time available to the Council and on the other on the competence of the representatives taking part in the sessions. In that respect, not only the personal competence of representatives must be taken into account but also the question of the influence which they exerted in their own countries. In view of the fact that the Council was competent only to submit simple recommendations to Governments, its influence would be practically non-existent if those recommendations were not supported by persons whose word was respected by their Governments and by public opinion.

Finally, he wondered whether, by adopting the proposal of the United Kingdom delegation, the Committee might not prevent non-governmental organizations or specialized agencies from requesting the inclusion of items on the Council's agenda, since that agenda would be determined in advance.

Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) wished to reply to two of the comments which the Chairman had just made. He wished to point out that in presenting his proposals he had intended to assist small countries which, instead of being represented by two or three specialized experts during long sessions, as at present, would only have to send one expert at a time for a short period to attend the session devoted to social questions and later another expert who would follow the work of the session on economic questions. That solution, which would not eliminate the difficulties encountered during the summer session, would nevertheless facilitate the task of numerically small delegations.

/With regard

With regard to the inclusion of items in the agenda, he recognized that a new procedure would have to be adopted. He suggested that at the beginning of each year the Council could devote two or three meetings to drawing up an annual programme of work. Countries requesting the inclusion of any item would have to accept the Council decision as to when the discussion of that item would be most appropriate.

Another question which might raise some difficulties related to the President of the Council himself and the amount of time which he could devote to the direction of the work of all the sessions. Nevertheless that problem did not seem to be insoluble, as the President could, as always, call upon the Vice-Presidents for assistance.

The CHAIRMAN stressed the fact that in general delegations from small countries had at most only three or four members who were in a position to participate in discussions. Those members must not only follow the economic and social activities of the United Nations but must also participate in the work of all of its organs, the General Assembly, its committees and sub-committees. He therefore thought that those delegations should be consulted before the organization of the Council was changed.

Mr. LUBIN (United States of America) stated that the Agenda Committee could meet early in the year to sort out the important problems on the Council's agenda. Specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations could make recommendations to the Agenda Committee at that time and also, if necessary, at a later date when they knew what items were already on the agenda and when they would be considered. They could be allowed to submit suggestions, for example, up to two months before the opening of a session. He was convinced that, if the Council decided to apply the system proposed by the United Kingdom delegation, many of the major difficulties could be overcome.

/He felt

He felt that the United Kingdom's suggestion was bound to facilitate the work of small delegations which, instead of having to give up their experts for almost eight weeks, as was the case at present, would have to send only one expert at a time to each successive session held during the year.

Mr. DEVINAT (France) agreed with the representative of the United Kingdom that it would be advisable to draw up the Council's agenda as far as possible on an annual basis. That measure, which had already been proposed in the memorandum presented by France, should expedite the Council's work.

For certain general items, the agenda should be drawn up one year in advance; in other words, it should be known from the month of January of a given year what important debates would take place in the course of the remainder of the year.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that after studying the question of the Council's organization the Committee should consider the operation of the functional commissions.

Mr. CHANG (China), supported by Mr. CHERNYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and Mr. BRENNAN (Australia), thought that before turning to the consideration of the re-organization and operation of the Council's commissions, the Committee should continue its study of the various proposals which had been presented in connexion with the organization of the Council itself. To enable the members to have a clearer idea of those proposals, he suggested that the Secretariat should be asked to prepare for the following meeting a document summarizing the various suggestions submitted in the various memoranda or made verbally by members of the Committee.

That proposal was adopted.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.