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STATISTICAL COMMISSION

FOURTH SESSION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FORTY-SIXTH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 2 May 1949, at 10 a.m.

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(Item 11(a) of the Agenda).

N.B. Will delegates who wish to have corrections made to the Summary Record please submit such corrections in writing on the official notepaper of their delegation to the Secretariat, Room C.452, as soon as possible after distribution of the Summary Record.

MAY 20 1949

Present:

Chairman:

Mr. IDENBURG Netherlands

Rapporteur:

Mr. CAMPION United Kingdom

Members:

Mr. MARSHALL Canada

Mr. LIU China

Mr. DARMOIS France

Mr. MAHALANOBIS India

Mr. RYABICHKO
(Vice-Chairman) Ukrainian Soviet
Socialist Republic

Mr. RYABUSHKIN Union of Soviet
Socialist Republics

Mr. RICE United States of
America

Representatives of
Specialized Agencies:

Mr. WOODBURY International Labour
Organization

Mr. CHOMBART de LAUWE Food and Agriculture
Organization

Mr. HOFMAN United Nations
Educational,
Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Mr. HICKS International Monetary
Fund

Mr. PASCUA)
Mr. GIBBS) World Health
Organization

Secretariat:

Mr. LEONARD Representing the
Assistant Secretary
General for Economic
Affairs

Mr. BRUCE Secretary to the
Commission

Mr. LOFTUS Statistical Office

1. OTHER BUSINESS - PROGRESS REPORT ON THE 1950 WORLD CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE (Item 10(a) of the Agenda) (Document E/CN.3/74)

The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the Commission to the fact that questions relating to the 1950 world census of agriculture had already been dealt with in connection with other items on the agenda. No further discussion would therefore be necessary after the Commission had heard the statement of the representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Mr. CHOMBART de LAUWE (Food and Agriculture Organization) said that at the fourth session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization member governments had been requested to take an agricultural census in 1950. A programme had been drawn up, after consultation with governments, containing two lists of items. One was of limited scope, but the other which was intended for countries possessing more developed statistical facilities, was somewhat wider. The Food and Agriculture Organization was assisting governments by providing statistical centres and by circulating a manual on census methods. Expert statisticians were also to be placed at the disposal of governments requiring them. At the moment, 65 countries had agreed to take an agricultural census; and it was hoped that as a result detailed information would be obtained on a number of extremely important questions.

2. OTHER BUSINESS - DEVELOPED OF SOCIAL STATISTICS (Item 10(c) of the Agenda) (Document E/CN.3/77)

The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the Commission to paragraph 5 of the Secretariat's paper, in which a list of subject in the field of social statistics which called for special study were enumerated, and stated that the Secretariat hoped that the Commission

would indicate which of those subjects should be given preferential treatment; and propose for inclusion any additional subjects which might have been omitted.

Mr. RICE (United States of America) stated that social statistics were relatively poorly developed by comparison with economic statistics, a situation which certainly required adjustment. The subjects listed in paragraph 5 illustrated the wide range which must be covered. The work of the Statistical Office in the social field would involve an even greater degree of collaboration with Specialized Agencies and other interested bodies than elsewhere.

Mr. RYABICHKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) stated that before the Secretariat could embark on the systematic collection and collation of data, certain problems of methodology would have to be dealt with to ensure uniformity of definitions and comparability of data. Accordingly, provision should be made for such work in the Commission's resolution.

He also had some suggestions to offer with regard to the list of subjects given in paragraph 5. Item A-3 "Health or sickness insurance" should be sub-divided under two heads: Government insurance and private insurance; item A-7 "Children's allowances" should be revised to read "Allowances for large families"; item C-4 "Medical facilities" should be sub-divided to differentiate between free medical facilities and those for which fees were paid; and item D-4 "Technical and vocational schools" should be sub-divided so as to distinguish free schools from others.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) agreed with the representative of the Ukrainian SSR that work would first have to be done on the methodological side before the Secretariat could

proceed with the collection of data from governments. The subjects listed under items B and C in paragraph 5 fell within the competence of the Population Commission, and would therefore call for close co-operation with that body. He would draw the attention of the Commission to the omission of data on labour movements, trade union movements and strikes from the list of subjects.

In connection with the amendment proposed by the representative of the Ukrainian SSR to Item A-7, the CHAIRMAN observed that there appeared to be some misunderstanding. In certain countries allowances were paid not only for large families, but even for the first child. He considered therefore that that item should remain unchanged.

Mr. RYABICHKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) withdrew his amendment to Item A-7 in the light of the Chairman's explanation.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada) agreed with the views expressed by the representatives of the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian SSR on the methodological aspects of the work. He had every confidence that the Secretariat would act in close collaboration with interested Specialized Agencies.

Mr. DARMOIS (France) stated that it would be necessary for the Secretariat to ask governments to provide detailed comments on the data furnished, since practice in the field of social statistics varied very widely between countries.

Mr. WOODBURY (International Labour Organization) informed the Commission that the International Labour Office was for the first time collecting data on social insurance; that data would become available in the forthcoming edition of "The Labour Statistics Year Book". It was hoped to provide further information on other countries in the next edition. A number of difficulties had arisen in the course of the work owing to variations in the administrative practices of different countries.

In connection with the point raised by the representative of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic that a distinction should be drawn between government and private insurance, he would point out that the heading of Item A was "Social insurance and assistance". It was presumably, therefore, not intended to include insurance by independent bodies. However, there should be no objection to the addition of a separate heading to cover insurance generally.

The International Labour Office had found that statistics on trade union movements presented special difficulties. However, information on strikes had been published by the Office for many years, giving the number of persons affected and the labour days lost.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, welcomed the proposal to include in the Statistical Commission's programme the study of social statistics. He feared, however, that little progress could be achieved, at least during the initial stages, in the field of international comparability owing to the great variations in the social legislation of different countries. The kind of problem that would be encountered had been brought into sharp relief in his own country within the last year by the introduction of compulsory all-inclusive social insurance. All the relevant figures were now being brought together under one heading, and the problem was how to obtain data separately on unemployment, health statistics, old age pensioners etc.

Information on children's allowances was also apt to vary from country to country, since a number of indirect allowances were also involved. In the United Kingdom they included free milk and meals, and income tax exemptions.

Mr. LIEU (China) stated that Item B-3 "Contracts let or permits issued" was of interest for the purposes of compiling indices of business prosperity. The words "and their value" should therefore be added to that item.

As far as information on insurance and education was concerned, it was of special interest to his Government that the data should indicate what proportion of the cost was being borne by the State.

Mr. PASCUA (World Health Organisation) agreed with the United Kingdom representative that international comparability in the field of social statistics would be very difficult to achieve. Even in the case of an ostensibly simple item like mortality, the statistics of different countries varied according to the definition of stillbirths. The World Health Organisation had found that the reliability of figures on notifiable diseases varied greatly according to the standard of public health, and local administration of the country providing the figures. The Executive Board at its last session had adopted a resolution referring the whole question of health statistics to an expert committee so that the latter might consider how such data could be collected, and in what form it could be published.

One of the most difficult subjects in which to secure international comparability was expenditure on public health. Responsibility was frequently split between various Government bodies - central or federal administrations, different ministries, municipalities etc. There was also the question of expenditure by voluntary organisations. In addition, there was uncertainty as to what items of expenditure came under the head of public health. Was it to include the cost and maintenance of water supply, plant for milk pasteurisation and such items? At the present moment the World Health Organisation had decided to take no action on the subject owing to the difficulties to which he had referred. It would therefore be necessary for the Commission to proceed with the utmost caution when touching upon those matters. Until homogeneous figures, based upon uniform standard classifications, were obtainable, no significant advance could be made.

Mr. HOFMAN (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) said that his Organisation was concerned with the items listed in sub-paragraphs D and E of paragraph 5. It was aware of its responsibilities, and intended to take steps towards the compilation of statistics covering those items, making a distinction between state and private schools. But there were considerable methodological difficulties, and it was not easy to obtain international comparable data on those items.

Mr. RYABICHKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the discussion had shown that the Secretariat must carefully study problems of methodology and of setting up international standards, before it embarked on the compilation of international social statistics. The list of items in Paragraph 5 should be revised in the light of those methodological problems. Item A-7 should be changed to "children's allowances systems", since many varied forms of assistance to children were provided in different countries. Another item, "employees' holidays", might also be added to group A., and statistics relating to free sanatoria for workers might be compiled. If statistics showing the numbers of free schools and schools levying fees were compiled separately, that would provide a yardstick for gauging a Government's attitude towards education.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, pointing out that the Commission could only take preliminary action on the question of social statistics at its present session, enquired whether the Commission would be prepared to adopt a resolution taking note of the

preliminary work done by the Secretariat and specialised agencies in the collection of social statistics, and to request the Secretary General to submit, after consultation with the specialised agencies a report on the scope of the principal classes of existing social statistics, and on the methods used in compiling such statistics.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)

thought that many representatives, especially those of the United Kingdom and the World Health Organisation, were unduly pessimistic as to the possibility of obtaining internationally comparable social statistics. He agreed that there were many complex problems to be solved before that could be done, and that all due caution should be exercised; but it was highly desirable that those problems should be solved. Even negative answers were often useful. The discussion had confirmed his view that questions of methodology should be studied first. He could agree to the resolution suggested by the Rapporteur, but wished to urge the addition thereto of a passage to the effect that other organs of the United Nations, particularly the Social and Population Commissions, should be consulted, and that in preparing the report the Secretariat should bear in mind the views expressed at the present meeting. He was glad that the International Labour Office was collecting information about strikes and the labour movement, but the Statistical Office should not for that reason fail to consider statistics on those items; one of the functions of the Statistical Office was to co-ordinate the statistical work done by all the organs of the United Nations and the Specialised Agencies.

The CHAIRMAN ascertained that no representative opposed the adoption of a resolution along the lines suggested by the Rapporteur and the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. He pointed out that their suggestions also covered the proposal made by the representative of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He assumed that the draft text to be submitted by the Rapporteur would contain, in effect, a request that the Secretariat study the question of compiling internationally comparable social statistics.

3. FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK.

The CHAIRMAN enquired whether any representative wished to raise any other question under Item 10 of the Agenda - Other business.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada), in conformity with the intention he had expressed, as Chairman, at the Thirty-Sixth meeting of the Commission (see Document E/CN.3/SR.36, page 3), read out a memorandum entitled "Future Programme of Work".

He pointed out that the methods at present adopted by the Commission for carrying out its programme of work had not proved as satisfactory as had been anticipated. He suggested a new method of operation combining certain of the elements of the various alternatives which he presented to the Commission. His programme could be summarised as follows:

(a) the Statistical Office should in all cases do the preliminary work for the setting up of standards;

(b) the Statistical Office should have provision in its establishment for the employment of experts for limited periods, to work on definitive drafts of reports; and

(c) for each subject, as the preliminary work was completed, one or more experts, outstanding in the field, should be taken on the Statistical Office staff for limited periods. Probably never more than three would be needed for periods not exceeding six months each, and in most

cases one would suffice, possibly for a shorter period.

On the proposal of the CHAIRMAN,

the Commission agreed to defer discussion of the Canadian representative's memorandum, on the methods of completing the future programme of work, until the next meeting.

Mr. BRUCE, Secretary to the Commission, said that the Memorandum would be translated into Russian as soon as possible to meet the request of the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

4. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK (Item 11(a) of the Agenda) (Document E/CN.3/80).

Mr. BRUCE, Secretary to the Commission, said that the financial estimates in Document E/CN.3/80 had been drawn up before the present session had begun its discussion of the recommendations relating to various items of the agenda, and took into consideration the provisions of the 1949 budget and the estimates requested for 1950. Two main points called for emphasis: first, it was recommended that the cost of providing technical assistance for improving national statistics should be taken up in the budget which would be submitted for approval to the General Assembly for the implementation of Resolution 200 (III) of the General Assembly. It was suggested in relation to item 6 that "the Commission might indicate that it considered that the terms of the Assembly resolution should be amended". Second, there was the question of the implementation of the recommendations made at the Third Session of the Commission. Those had been approved by the Economic and Social Council and referred to the General Assembly; but at the General Assembly only about half of the proposed expenditure for the implementation of the Commission's plans had been agreed to; accordingly those financial implications had been included in the budget estimates for 1950.

Replying to Mr. MARSHALL (Canada), Mr. LEONARD, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, said that sufficient funds had been made available by the General Assembly at its Third Session for carrying out research on items 7 (a), (b) and (c) of the Agenda, but not for carrying out work on item 7 (d) (Price Indices) and 7(e) (Transport Statistics).

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that it was too early to consider the estimates in Document E/CN.3/80, since they were based on draft recommendations which the Commission had not yet finally approved. On his proposal,

the Commission agreed to defer discussion of the financial estimates drawn up by the Secretariat (Document E/CN.3/80) until such time as the Commission had examined the relevant sections of its report.

Mr. HOFMAN (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) said that his Organisation was ready to co-operate with the International Statistical Institute and other international bodies in carrying out the programme for statistical education; if requested it was also prepared to assume responsibility for administering the programme. But he wished to know the exact meaning of paragraph 5 of the section of the Commission's Draft Report dealing with the development of national statistics (Document E/CN.3/W.11/Add.2), and in particular the meaning of the sentence "It was understood that the cost of the proposals in this programme (statistical education programme) would not fall directly upon the United Nations." The training would be of greater use to organisations other than UNESCO. All the international organisations concerned should contribute to the cost of the training, which was inordinately heavy.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, pointed out that

financial estimates of the cost of implementing the Commission's recommendations were submitted for its information and in order to provide a means of clarifying the Commission's recommendations for the Secretariat; but the Commission was not called upon to approve the estimates, and such decisions involving expenditure as their representatives on the Commission might take would not, therefore, be binding on governments.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

