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QUESTION OF THE CORRECTION OF VOTES IN THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS COMMITTEES: REPORT  
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Report of the Sixth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. A.J.P. TAMMES (Netherlands)

1. The General Assembly, by resolution 901 (IX) of 14 December 1954, requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its tenth session, a report:  
    "(a) On the terms and application of the rules which in other inter-governmental organizations and in parliaments govern the announcement of the results of votes, on the conditions subject to which corrections are admitted and on the consequences of such corrections;  
    "(b) On possible provisions designed to prevent and correct any mistakes which might occur during the voting procedure in the General Assembly and its Committees."
2. In compliance with that resolution, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly a report (A/2977) containing a comparative study of the rules of national parliaments and inter-governmental organizations and the practice followed by them, relating to: (a) methods of voting and prevention of errors; (b) announcement of the results of votes; and (c) the problem of the correction of votes. In his conclusions, the Secretary-General suggested some possible provisions with respect to sub-paragraph (b) of resolution 901 (IX) quoted above.
3. At its 530th plenary meeting held on 30 September 1955, the General Assembly decided to include in the agenda of its tenth session the item "Question of the correction of votes in the General Assembly and its Committees: report of the

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Secretary-General". At the same plenary meeting, the Assembly allocated the item to the Sixth Committee for consideration.

4. The Sixth Committee considered the item at its 455th to 458th meetings, held between 8 and 14 November 1955.

5. The following draft resolutions and amendments were successively submitted to the Committee:

(a) A draft resolution proposed by Australia (A/C.6/L.364) which was later revised (A/C.6/L.364/Rev.1).

(b) A draft resolution proposed by Venezuela (A/C.6/L.365) which was later withdrawn.

(c) A draft resolution proposed by Guatemala (A/C.6/L.366), which was later withdrawn.

(d) A draft resolution proposed jointly by Brazil, India and Syria (A/C.6/L.367).

(e) Amendments submitted orally by the representatives of New Zealand and Greece to the joint draft resolution (A/C.6/L.367), which were accepted by the sponsors.

6. The draft resolution of Australia, in its revised form (A/C.6/L.364/Rev.1) provided, in paragraph 1 of the operative part, that the General Assembly should decide to insert after the third sentence of rule 89 of its rules of procedure a provision prescribing that, immediately after the roll had been called in a roll-call vote, the names of any Members whose representatives had not answered should be called again and their answers recorded as a part of the roll-call vote. A similar provision was contained in paragraph 2 for insertion in rule 128 relating to procedure in Committees. According to paragraph 3, the General Assembly would insert in its rules of procedure a new rule (93(a)) providing that, at the conclusion of voting on a proposal or amendment the President should announce the number of votes in favour, the number against and the number of abstentions, and should state whether the proposal or amendment had been adopted or rejected or that a second vote would be required, as the case might be. Paragraph 4 contained a provision for a similar rule (132 (a)) but without reference to a second vote. In paragraphs 5 and 6, it was proposed that the Assembly should adopt two new rules (97(a) and 134 (a)) whereby, unless it could be shown by a

representative or the Secretariat to the satisfaction of the President [or the Chairman] that a clerical or arithmetical error had occurred, the results of voting on a proposal or amendment, as announced by the President [or the Chairman], should be final and conclusive.

7. The draft resolution submitted by Venezuela (A/C.6/L.365) provided in part A that the General Assembly should decide to include in its rules of procedure two new rules (93(a) and 132 (a)) whereby, when a vote was taken on a matter other than an election, a representative might correct his vote immediately after the President [or the Chairman] had announced the result of the vote, but that a correction should not modify the result announced. In part B, the draft resolution provided that the Assembly should request the Secretary-General:

(a) To prepare a further report embodying the section of document A/2977 relating to voting by electrical equipment and stating the financial implications of the installation of the equipment, adding such other data and suggestions as he might deem desirable to include;

(b) To transmit the further report to Member States requesting them to communicate their comments not later than 30 June 1956;

(c) To include in the provisional agenda of the eleventh session of the General Assembly the question of voting by electrical equipment, and to submit the further report, and the replies of Member States, at that session.

8. The draft resolution of Guatemala (A/C.6/L.366) provided that the General Assembly would decide:

(a) To add to its rules of procedure two new rules (89(a), and 128(a)) containing detailed provisions to ensure the accuracy of the counting of votes in the General Assembly and its Committees and the correction of any errors that might arise;

(b) To add to rules 90 and 129 a paragraph prescribing, where the object of the voting was not an election, (i) that any representative who voted in error might, after the President [or the Chairman] had announced the result, request that his explanations should appear in the record; and (ii) that the result already announced should not be affected thereby.

9. The draft resolution submitted jointly by Brazil, India and Syria (A/C.6/L.367) provided that the General Assembly would:

- (a) Commend the report of the Secretary-General (A/2977);
- (b) Take note of the said report and draw the attention of the Member States to the conclusions contained therein; and
- (c) Decide to take no further action thereon for the present.

10. The oral amendment submitted by the representative of New Zealand proposed the deletion in the second paragraph of the joint draft resolution (A/C.6/L.367) of the phrase "draws the attention of the Member States to". The oral amendment submitted by the representative of Greece proposed to add at the end of the same resolution the words "and recommends that Member States should continue to study the question".

11. In the course of the debate several speakers favoured the adoption of explicit rules concerning the announcement of the result of votes and the correction of votes. Some of these representatives considered the absence of such rules as a serious deficiency, which in the past had sometimes caused difficulties. Others felt that a satisfactory and fairly stable practice had developed in these matters, but that it might be useful to give formal sanction to that practice by introducing some minor changes in the rules of procedure.

12. A larger number of representatives was of the opinion that there existed no necessity for amending the rules and making express provision for the correction of votes; it was stated that such a course might create more problems than the Committee was attempting to solve and might deprive the prevailing system of its flexibility and lead to misunderstanding.

13. In particular, some speakers feared that the proposal concerning roll-call votes made by Australia, i.e. that immediately after the roll had been called the names of Members whose representatives had not answered would be called again, might lead to abuse. For example, a delegation might be tempted to remain silent on the first call in order to be able to weigh the possible influence of its vote before committing itself. The very purpose of the method of proceeding in alphabetical order starting with a delegation chosen by lot might thereby be defeated.

14. With regard to measures for preventing errors, some delegations expressed the view that an electrical voting device should be given a trial, or at least that the question of using it in the General Assembly and its Committees should be studied. Others held that the considerable expense involved would not be justified and that it was inadvisable to take any decision on the matter for the time being. It was also felt that that question should not be dealt with by the Sixth Committee, but referred to the Fifth Committee in view of its financial implications.

15. At the conclusion of the debate, the representative of Belgium suggested that no further action should be taken on the draft resolutions submitted by Australia (A/C.6/L.364), Venezuela (A/C.6/L.365) and Guatemala (A/C.6/L.366) and that a passage might be included in the report expressing, as the opinion of the majority, that the amendments to the rules of procedure proposed by Australia and Venezuela, in so far as they referred (a) to the manner in which the votes were to be counted and in which the President should announce the result of the voting; and (b) to corrections of votes after the announcement of the result of the voting, were unnecessary because they corresponded to the established practice of the United Nations, namely: that at the conclusion of voting, except in the case of elections, the President [or Chairman] should announce the number of votes in favour, the number against and the number of abstentions and should state whether the proposal or amendment had been adopted or rejected, or that a second vote would be required, as the case might be; and that a correction of his vote by a representative after announcement of the result of the voting by the President should not modify the result announced.

16. In view of this suggestion by the representative of Belgium, the draft resolutions submitted by Venezuela and Guatemala were withdrawn.

17. In the course of a procedural discussion regarding the action to be taken, it was pointed out that the passage suggested by the representative of Belgium could not be included in the report in such a way as to express the opinion of the majority of the Sixth Committee. Such a formula would imply a counting of votes and, therefore, a taking of action which the Committee wanted to avoid. On the other hand, reference was made to the fact that the draft resolutions submitted by Venezuela and Guatemala had been withdrawn in the light of the discussion in

the Committee, including the suggestion made by the representative of Belgium for the incorporation in the report of a passage along the lines indicated in paragraph 15 above. In view of these considerations, the representative of Belgium expressed his preference for the inclusion in the report of a statement that the substance of the passage suggested by him reflected the opinion of a number of delegations and that this opinion was not contested.

18. Under these circumstances, the consensus was that the Sixth Committee should merely take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/2977) and take no further action for the present, and that Member States should continue to study the question.

19. At its 457th meeting held on 10 November 1955, the Committee accepted without vote a proposal made by the representative of the United Kingdom to vote first on the joint draft resolution (A/C.6/L.367), as amended orally (see paragraphs 5 (e) and 10 above).

20. The results of the voting were as follows:

At the request of the representative of the Philippines, a separate vote was taken on the phrase "Recommends that Member States should continue to study the question" at the end of the joint draft resolution. The phrase was adopted by 30 votes to one, with 14 abstentions.

The joint draft resolution as a whole, as amended, was adopted by 44 votes to none, with 2 abstentions.

21. In view of the adoption of the joint draft resolution, the draft resolution of Australia (A/C.6/L.364/Rev.1) was not put to the vote.

22. The Sixth Committee therefore recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

QUESTION OF THE CORRECTION OF VOTES IN THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS COMMITTEES

The General Assembly

1. Commends the report (A/2977) of the Secretary-General on the question of correction of votes in the General Assembly and its Committees, submitted to the General Assembly at its tenth session;

2. Takes note of the said report and the conclusions contained therein;

3. Decides to take no further action thereon for the present;
4. Recommends that Member States should continue to study the question.

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