

GENERAL
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MEETING



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Chairman : Mr. T. A. STONE (Canada).

Budget estimates for the financial year 1952: (a) Budget estimates prepared by the Secretary-General (A/1812 and Add. 1; A/C.5/448, A/C.5/451); (b) Reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/1853)

[Item 41] *

First reading (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Administrative and Financial Service to answer a question put by the representative of the USSR on the previous day.

2. Mr. PRICE (Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services) understood that the USSR representative wished to know on what basis temporary assistance was calculated in formulating the budget estimates. The amount of temporary assistance required in any section depended upon the special tasks assigned to that section and the replacements required to cover long absences of staff, for instance on home leave. Requirements therefore varied considerably from section to section; the number of staff entitled to home leave was much higher in a language service, for instance, than among the manual workers. He cited examples from the budget estimates concerning the temporary assistance required for the General Assembly and for the performance of tasks in the Department of Economic Affairs in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 290 (XI). The procedure was first to canvass all possibilities within the Department and then to estimate accordingly for extra needs.

SECTION 11. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS

3. The CHAIRMAN invited the Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Social Affairs to make a statement.

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

4. Mr. GEORGES-PICOT (Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Social Affairs) outlined the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee on the budget estimates proposed by the Secretary-General for his Department. The reduction of \$ 60 000 on established posts would mean the elimination of eleven posts. The other reductions related to consultants, temporary assistance and travel.

5. Upon taking up his duties a month previously, he had noted with satisfaction the list of tasks before his Department, seeing in them a proof of the vitality of the Organization and of its progressive adaptation to its work; but he had been struck by the contradiction between those aims and the proposed reduction in the means to carry them out. The previous year his predecessor, Mr. Laugier, had been granted the credits he had requested, but even so had not been able to fulfil all the tasks assigned to his Department.

6. Mr. Georges-Picot emphasized the Secretary-General's statement (A/C.5/448) that some items on the Department's programme would have to be eliminated if the appropriation voted was less than that for 1951. He assured the Committee that the Department had already been so reorganized as to enable it to absorb new tasks by means of redistribution of work. That reorganization having just been completed, he hoped that reductions would not now be imposed compelling revision of the work programme and involving disorganization of the services. That would jeopardize the whole structure and work of the department and would result not merely in slowing down, but in retrenchment and disappointment of the hopes placed by so many people in the social work of the United Nations.

7. That was not what he had expected to have to face and he felt that it was not what the Fifth Committee would desire. He therefore asked the Committee to ensure the continuity of his Department's work by voting the sum of \$ 1,657,500 initially proposed by the Secretary-General and later confirmed in the latter's statement of 8 October.

8. Mr. AGHNIDES (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) suggested that in order to shorten its work the Committee might adopt the procedure decided upon for section 10, namely, to request the Secretary-General to submit detailed supplementary estimates for the additional work arising out of decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its thirteenth session. The Advisory Committee could then report on those estimates, if the Fifth Committee so desired.
9. Mr. GEORGES-PICOT (Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Social Affairs) said that whereas for section 10 the recommended reductions related to an increase over the 1951 amount, for his Department the recommendations represented reductions below the 1951 level and would compel his Department to revise work programmes drawn up before the preparation of the budget, not since.
10. Mr. MACHADO (Brazil) thought that, after hearing the statement of the Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Social Affairs, the Committee had sufficient elements before it to take a decision on the budget for section 11 without delay. His delegation would however follow the Committee's wishes in the matter.
11. He felt that there was a great need to establish a standard for priorities, as the problem recurred annually. The Economic and Social Council should be compelled to apply a system of priorities for work assigned to the Secretariat, by the refusal of the Fifth Committee to grant the necessary credits.
12. His delegation was opposed to recurrent annual increases in staff. He therefore proposed that the appropriation for section 11 be maintained at the same figure as that approved for 1951—a sum sufficient to provide for the 215 established posts already authorized.
13. Miss WITTEVEEN (Netherlands) was in favour of adopting the procedure proposed by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. Her delegation considered the recommendations of the Committee acceptable and thought that the Department could perform its essential work with the sum recommended by the Advisory Committee. Its potential tasks were so vast that some selection was inevitable.
14. Referring to the previous day's discussion of section 10, she did not consider that the acknowledged ability of the Department of Economic Affairs to absorb new tasks was in itself a proof of an inflated budget or financial laxity.
15. Mrs. FAHMY (Egypt) supported the Brazilian representative's view that a decision could be reached immediately on the proposed estimates for section 11 and that they should be retained at the 1951 level.
16. Mr. AMMOUN (Lebanon) was in favour of requesting the Secretary-General to provide a summary of all the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its thirteenth session, in order to enable the Committee to decide whether they called for additional expenditure. He repeated the proposal made by his delegation on the previous day concerning closer co-ordination between the Economic and Social Council and the financial services of the Secretariat.
17. Mr. BUSTAMANTE (Mexico) thought the problem of additional expenditure was general and could not be settled merely in relation to specific sections of the budget.
18. He was concerned about the need for co-ordination between the Departments of Economic Affairs and Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration and suggested that the Secretariat, assisted by the Advisory Committee, should review the assignments of those three departments from a comprehensive point of view.
19. All the services which helped to improve conditions in the under-developed countries should have full support, but governments were unable to shoulder additional burdens and his delegation was therefore opposed in principle to voting additional expenditure.
20. Mr. POLLOCK (Canada) pointed out that the difference between the Secretary-General's proposals and the Advisory Committee's recommendations, issued before the last session of the Economic and Social Council, was very small.
21. Both social and economic affairs provided opportunities for applying a system of priorities; the Secretariat could use its discretion and achieve economies, particularly by exercising judgment as to the rate at which certain programmes were to be carried out.
22. The Assistant Secretary-General for Social affairs might perhaps be able to reconsider his attitude and reach a compromise with the Advisory Committee on its recommendations. The Secretariat might be urged so to arrange its work as to be able to keep the expenditure at the 1951 level, which would be a step towards the desired stabilization of the budget.
23. His delegation saw no cause for alarm in the Secretariat's willingness to absorb new tasks within its present budget, but thought that in future the information now being requested in the form of supplementary estimates should be available to the Committee from the outset.
24. Mr. ADARKAR (India) supported the proposal of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee regarding the procedure to be followed in dealing with the new tasks assigned to the Secretariat by the Economic and Social Council. The last sentence of paragraph 13 and the first sentence of paragraph 14 in the Secretary-General's statement on the budget estimates (A/C.5/448) appeared to be inconsistent and, despite the Assistant Secretary-General's assurances to the contrary, most representatives would draw the same conclusion as was drawn by the Brazilian representative in the case of the Department of Economic Affairs. It seemed to Mr. Adarkar that there was no essential difference between sections 10 and 11 in regard to those assignments and no reason therefore to depart from the procedure which the Committee had decided to follow in regard to section 10. He did not share the Assistant Secretary-General's somewhat pessimistic view that the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee might affect the Department's activities or prejudice the new tasks it had been asked to undertake.
25. The compromise proposed by the Brazilian and Egyptian representatives was not in accordance with the best financial principles, which called for elasticity to meet changing circumstances. No organization or department could manage its affairs efficiently within a rigid block appropriation.

26. In commenting on sections of the budget, the Advisory Committee had in some cases recommended a reduction in the number of established posts and in others a reduction in the financial provision for such posts. It would be helpful if the same procedure could be followed for all sections.

27. Mr. HAMBRO (Norway) supported the Netherlands representative's proposal. He shared the concern voiced by many representatives at the constant increase in the staff of the Organization; it was, however, obvious that if new activities were assigned to departments, they could not be carried out without some increase in staff.

28. All delegations must share the views expressed by the Mexican representative regarding the lack of co-ordination of the work of different departments and organizations. He would not, however, put forward the proposals of his Government and of the Governments of Denmark and Sweden on the matter, as they would only affect subsequent estimates and had no bearing on the estimates under discussion. He would later submit a resolution requesting the Secretary-General to study the question and submit proposals to the Advisory Committee with a view to their discussion by the Fifth Committee at the next session.

29. Sir William MATTHEWS (United Kingdom) said that the social activities of the United Nations, desirable though they were, must be related to the resources available to finance them. In its report to the General Assembly, the Advisory Committee had put its finger on defects in organization; it had not recommended any cuts in services. The budget estimates submitted by the Secretary-General represented a dissipation of resources on projects which were not of immediate interest and which should be given a low priority. While his delegation fully appreciated the need for social development, it supported the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee.

30. He trusted that the supplementary estimates to be submitted by the Secretary-General in respect of additional activities would take the form of a list of projects and would be accompanied by an indication that, after a careful scrutiny of the resources available, it had been found possible to undertake the projects in question within the appropriation recommended by the Advisory Committee.

31. His delegation felt some concern at the development of what might be described as a system of special pleading in the Fifth Committee, of a tendency to regard the Committee as a rubber stamp for new proposals. Such a tendency was detrimental to sound financial control; and criticism had resulted in the submission of compromise proposals by members of the Committee. It was, however, impossible to compromise with an obvious dissipation of funds. The Advisory Committee's suggestions had been made after careful investigation and the reductions proposed could easily be absorbed within the total budget of the section. More evidence was needed of a constructive effort on the part of the Secretariat to conduct its activities within the limits of the means provided at great sacrifice by the over-burdened governments of Member States.

32. Mr. HSIA (China) said that his delegation was prepared to accept either of the two solutions proposed, namely, that the appropriation recommended by the

Advisory Committee should be accepted and supplementary estimates be submitted in respect of new activities or that the appropriation recommended by the Advisory Committee should be increased to the appropriation voted for 1951.

33. Mr. GANEM (France) agreed in principle that either solution was equally acceptable. In the present case, however, he preferred the compromise solution proposed by the Brazilian and Egyptian representatives, but would suggest that the appropriation recommended by the Advisory Committee should be increased to the round sum of \$1,600,000, which was somewhat below the 1951 figure and would therefore call for the exercise of the maximum economy on the part of the Secretary-General.

34. Mr. FOURIE (Union of South Africa) agreed with the Indian representative that paragraphs 13 and 14 of the Secretary-General's statement on the budget estimates (A/C.5/448) were inconsistent. He did not think that there was any fundamental difference between the positions of the Departments of Social and Economic Affairs; the same procedure should therefore be applied to both sections of the estimates.

35. He agreed with the Brazilian representative that the time had come to call a halt to the continuous expansion of the Department of Social Affairs, as of other departments, an expansion largely due to circumstances outside the Secretary-General's control. By adopting a firm and consistent policy, the Committee would provide the Secretary-General with an effective tool in his efforts to secure economies.

36. He did not wish to suggest that no new activities should be undertaken. In the course of time old projects would be completed and the achievement of closer co-ordination between the Departments of Social and Economic Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration would permit new tasks to be undertaken.

37. The Lebanese representative's suggestion regarding priorities was of great interest. Until a satisfactory system had been evolved, however, the only solution was the establishment of financial limits, within which the Secretary-General should attempt to fulfil the functions assigned to him. If that procedure was followed for some years, a satisfactory system would no doubt be evolved.

38. Mr. BRENNAN (Australia) asked the Chairman for a ruling as to whether the proposal that the Secretary-General should submit supplementary estimates was a procedural motion and would thus be voted on first, since the ruling given would affect the sum for which delegations would vote. If once the Secretary-General were requested to submit supplementaries, it would be illogical to vote for a figure that assumed no supplementaries would be requested. His delegation was in favour of the compromise solution to increase the appropriation recommended by the Advisory Committee to \$1,600,000, considering that the Secretary-General should be encouraged to pursue the attitude he had adopted at the last session of the Economic and Social Council.

39. Mr. PACHACHI (Iraq) said that the Fifth Committee the previous year had asked the Secretary-General to reorganize the Department of Social Affairs with a view to eliminating some structural defects and effecting economy. However, the budget reflected

no such economy, although some organizational changes had been made.

40. It was argued that the decisions of the Economic and Social Council at its recent session had increased the work programme of the Department, a fact which had inevitably led to an increase in expenditure. But the Secretary-General in his statement of 8 October and Mr. Georges-Picot had both said that the present appropriations would be sufficient to absorb the additional workload. That was another example of unauthorized projects being used as a basis for budgetary estimates, and in principle it was obviously wrong. Estimates should be made on the basis of well-defined projects, and subsequent responsibilities should be met by supplementary estimates. The vote on the budget estimates should therefore be taken on the basis of the Advisory Committee's recommendations. Supplementary estimates could then be presented after a careful study of the new responsibilities imposed on the Department by the Economic and Social Council.

41. The large sum asked for consultants and temporary assistance was yet another example of the inflexibility and lack of interchangeability which were still dominant despite the repeated criticisms of rigidity and over-specialization in the Secretariat. The reduction of \$60,000 in the item for established posts would not seriously affect the ability of the Department to discharge its functions. The total salaries paid to professional officers in the Department were well over \$1,000,000, and it should be understood that the new tasks assigned to the Department would be allotted new appropriations which might compensate for the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee.

42. Mr. VALENZUELA (Chile) remarked that, as in previous discussions on financial matters, frequent references had been made to three broad categories of subjects: priorities, new activities of an economic and social character, and expansion of personnel.

43. With regard to the first, his delegation felt that, since definite guidance was given by the Charter with respect to the most important priorities, the Assembly already had an adequate framework on which to found its general attitude, at all events as far as vital economic and social projects were concerned. It was clearly not proper that economies, if they had to be made, should have their most severe effect in those fields in which concrete economic and social measures were contemplated.

44. The Economic and Social Council had been subjected to considerable criticism owing to its undeniable tendency to evolve projects involving substantial financial implications. That tendency was, however, to a large extent inevitable, and was indeed to be expected, and any suggestion that the activity of the Economic and Social Council should be subjected to special financial control and limitation was quite unjustified on those grounds alone. In any case, such a procedure with respect to the Economic and Social Council would require, as a matter of equity, to be accompanied by parallel action affecting other permanent United Nations organs. As far as the criticisms of "theoretical" and "academic" work which had been levelled against the Commission on Human Rights were concerned, he would remind the Committee that the Commission was the only one which had been established in accordance with the provisions of the

Charter itself. Any serious interference in its activities would, as a consequence, involve modification of the Charter.

45. With regard to the expansion of personnel, his Government, which, in common with all others, was interested in maintaining expenses at a reasonable level, believed that any undue development of bureaucracy which had occurred in the Organization was a result of what he would term the horizontal expansion of the specialized agencies rather than the vertical expansion of the United Nations proper. In any decision to apply priorities in staffing, that, he felt, was a consideration to be borne in mind.

46. With respect to the compromise proposal which had been submitted, he was inclined to doubt whether the Department of Social Affairs could safely permit its budget to be rigidly limited to \$1,600,000, but he would be interested to know the feelings of the Assistant Secretary-General on that point.

47. His delegation's general attitude was one of support for the estimates submitted by the Secretary-General, with the proviso that it would be prepared to accept the reduction of \$7,500 which the Advisory Committee had recommended in respect of travel on official business.

48. Mr. ABBASI (Pakistan) said that, whereas his Government would not normally be prepared to support any proposal likely to restrict the range of activity or the effectiveness of the Department of Social Affairs, in the case in question it could agree with the point of view just expressed by the United Kingdom representative. The cuts proposed by the Advisory Committee were supported by cogent arguments and there was little to show that any axe had descended upon the Department and its work. Indeed, the only argument which could be adduced against the cuts was that they would not permit implementation of the work programme as recently approved by the Economic and Social Council.

49. With regard to supplementary estimates, there was no fundamental reason why they should not be submitted and accepted, providing adequate proof was given that they were genuinely required.

50. Mr. FRIIS (Denmark) maintained his original view that essential work should be continued, while means and methods should be simplified to the utmost. The Advisory Committee's proposals on the whole represented a development which was consonant with that aim.

51. It would be recalled that at the previous session a number of representatives had urged the Secretary-General to merge the Department of Economic Affairs, the Department of Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration. The Advisory Committee was also now alluding to such a possibility. Since, however, the Secretary-General had not yet expressed his views, the Danish delegation welcomed the Egyptian representative's initiative and proposed resolution in that connexion.

52. Another point of importance was the relationship of the Division of Narcotic Drugs with the secretariat of the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Supervisory Body. He would appreciate observations from the Assistant Secretary-General as to whether the present arrangement, by which there were two secretariats, one on either side of the Atlantic, was the most suitable from the point of view of economy and efficiency.

53. While he would not agree that some of the activities of the Division of Human Rights were "theoretical" or "academic", it was perhaps true to say that the manner in which the explanatory notes relating to the Division were presented in the budget estimates was on occasions rather academic and theoretical. Indeed, the notes in question seemed to be a mixture of references to achievements in the past and somewhat vague conjectures about the future. That had, of course, been to some extent unavoidable, since the budget had been drawn up before the thirteenth session of the Economic and Social Council, which had clarified a number of previously doubtful aspects of the Division's programme.

54. He had one suggestion to make in connexion with official travel, references to which were constantly occurring in all budget discussions. He had observed that certain of the specialized agencies, including the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organization, submitted complete lists of all attendances by their personnel at conferences and meetings. He wondered whether it might not be helpful if such a document containing similar information for United Nations personnel could be produced for the Committee's future sessions.

55. Finally, with regard to the provision for consultants in the budget of the Department of Social Affairs, the views which he had expressed at the previous meeting, when the Department of Economic Affairs had been discussed, applied in the present case also.

56. Mr. VORYS (United States of America), observing that the Committee had two proposals before it—the

"compromise" solution and that proposed by the Netherlands representative—stated that his delegation supported the latter as being the more sensible and effective. An application of the "compromise" solution would involve an attempt to bind the Secretary-General not to submit supplementary estimates. As he saw the situation, however, the Secretary-General had precisely the duty of submitting such estimates if he thought necessary.

57. The fact had also to be borne in mind that the question of the cost of the new Economic and Social Council programmes had not been before the Advisory Committee. If therefore the Fifth Committee adopted the Advisory Committee's recommendations on other matters, and permitted the Secretary-General to present detailed estimates in respect of new programmes, then the difficulty would be successfully composed.

58. Although some representatives had suggested that the Economic and Social Council could not be subject to the trusteeship of other bodies, he would submit that the converse was also true. The Fifth Committee would be unable to do its work if it was not to be permitted to exercise recommendatory authority in the financial and budgetary field. The Committee was the trustee of the United Nations in financial and budgetary matters.

59. The CHAIRMAN said that, as his list of speakers was not yet exhausted, the discussion would be concluded at that next meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.0 p.m.