

# ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Fourth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIXTY-FIFTH MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York, on Monday, 8 May 1950, at 3 p.m.

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| Chairman:     |   | Mrs. | LEFAUCHEUX     | France     |
|---------------|---|------|----------------|------------|
| Rapporteur:   |   | Mrs. | JURDAK KHOURY  | Lebanon    |
| Members:      |   | Miss | McCORKINDALE   | Australia  |
|               |   | Miss | Sieu-ling ZUNG | China      |
|               |   | Mrs. | MORALES        | Costa Rica |
|               | * | Miss | PEDERSEN       | Denmark    |
| : · · · · , · |   | Mrs. | TSALDARIS      | Greece     |
|               |   | Mrs. | GUERY          | Haiti      |
|               |   | Mrs. | SEN            | India      |
|               |   |      |                |            |

Members (continued):

Mrs. CASTILLO LEDON Mexico

Mrs. PEKTAS Turkey

Miss SUTHERIAND

United Kingdom of Great Britain

and Northern Ireland

Mrs. GOLDMAN

United States of America

Mrs. URDAWETA

Venezuela

Representative of a specialized agency:

Miss FAIRCHILD

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Category A:

Miss HERG

World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

Category B:

Mrs. RYDK Mrs. VAN DEN BERG

International Alliance of Women

Miss CARTER

International Council of Women

Miss TOMLINSON

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

MARTINI ESIM

International Union of Catholic

Women's Leagues

Miss ARNOLD Miss FOX

World Young Women's Christian

Association

Secretariat:

Mrs. MYRDAL

Principal Director of the

Department of Social Affairs

Mrs. MENCN

Secretary of the Commission

# ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

- Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) asked whether it was intended to set up a 1. number of committees as the Commission had done at its third session.
- The CHAIRMAN, supported by Mrs. URDANETA (Venezuela), said that she 2. thought it was most desirable that such a procedure should be adopted. It was preferable that questions discussed in plenary meeting should already have been thrashed out in committee.

3. The Chairman suggested that a questionnaire committee, a communications committee and a resolutions committee should be set up. The Commission could decide upon their membership at its next meeting, which would allow members time for consultation.

# It was so decided.

- 4. Mrs. SEN (India) wished to know the rules governing the participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations in discussions. She wondered whether they would be free to speak at any time or only during a specified part of the discussion.
- The CHAIRMAN replied that that was a matter for the Commission to decide and recalled that during the Commission's third session an entire meeting had been devoted to hearing statements from representatives of non-governmental organizations.
- 6. Generally speaking, the Commission's relations with non-governmental organizations were governed by rules 74 and 75 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.
- 7. At its third session the Commission had set up a committee specially to deal with liaison with non-governmental organizations. As some non-governmental organizations were relatively new, it had been thought advisable to set up a committee to establish satisfactory relations between them and the Commission. At the current session, however, such a committee seemed unnecessary.
- 8. The Commission would certainly agree that it was essential to have close co-operation with non-governmental organizations in a form acceptable both to the representatives of non-governmental organizations and to the members of the Commission. It would be useful if the representatives of non-governmental organizations were to inform the Commission of their views on the matter.
- 9. Mrs. RYCK (International /Illiance of Women) was sure that all the representatives of non-governmental organizations would welcome an opportunity to state their views at any stage of the discussion.

10. Miss TOWLINGON

- 10. Miss TOMLINSON (International Federation of Business and Professional Women) thought that the Commission might follow the procedure adopted the previous year, which had proved most satisfactory. Representatives of non-governmental organizations wishing to raise a question on a given item on the Commission's agenda would speak after the members of the Commission had stated their views.
- 11. The CHAIRMAN thanked the representatives of the International Alliance of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women and suggested that the Commission should adopt a procedure which would enable representatives of non-governmental organizations to express their views directly to the Commission on any item of the agenda.

It was so decided.

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

- (a) Report by the Secretary-General on discrimination against women in the field of political rights (E/CN.6/131, E/CN.6/131/Corr.1)
- 12. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) thought that the Secretary-General's report was of the greatest interest to the Commission and to the wide public which followed its work with such attention.
- 13. However, she had certain reservations to make with regard to paragraph 8 of the report which stated that "Only exceptionally does the percentage of women in any legislative assembly exceed ten, although women in most cases total approximately 50 per cent of the electorate." It was likely that no member of the Commission was satisfied with the situation in her own country, but the impression should not be given that, in the opinion of the Commission, women did not enjoy full political rights unless they occupied 50 per cent of the seats in national legislative assemblies.
- It would be unfair to criticize governments on that matter. In a democracy, the proportion of men and women elected to parliament could not be determined by the government: It depended on the political parties themselves, and consequently it lay with the women to work within the party organizations to obtain increased participation by women in the political life of their countries.

- 15. Moreover, it must be recognized that it was often difficult for women to stand for election if, for example, they were married and had families and did not live in the capital. On the other hand, it was easier for women to take part in the work of local government organs. That was a very important aspect of the participation of women in political life, which it was the Commission's duty to emphasize.
- 16. Lastly, it would be wrong to regard women elected to a national assembly or other body as representing not the electorate in general, but the female section in particular.
- 17. She also wished to point out that the figures given in the table on page 5 of the report were not always comparable, because in some cases they referred to one assembly, and in others to two.
- 18. Miss FEDERSEN (Denmark) did not share the misgivings of the United Kingdom representative with regard to paragraph 3 of the report; it should be read in the light of the preceding paragraphs.
- 19. With regard to the table mentioned by the United Kingdom representative, she wished to explain that the figures for Denmark concerned the national assembly only; if/women members of the Senate were taken into account, the result would be about 12 per cent.
- 20. It was none the less true, and that was the essential point, that the number of women elected to the various national assemblies was still very low. The percentage of women on local government bodies was also low.
- 21. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America), while recognizing the value of the report prepared by the Becretary-General, agreed that a study which took into account the part played by women in local government bodies would give a more exact idea of the participation of women in the political life of their countries.
- 22. In the United States of America, for example, women were taking an increasingly active part in the work of State Legislative Assemblies and were also serving as Mayors; many of them had also been elected to the municipal councils, where they had occasion to deal with practical problems. Generally speaking, women were becoming more and more conscious of their responsibilities in the political field.

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- 26. With regard to general elections, a draft revision of the National Constitution had been introduced in the Greek Chamber in which the granting to women of the right to vote had been prescribed but the Chamber had been dissolve before the draft revision of the Constitution had been discussed; Greek women had therefore been unable to take part in the most recent elections.
- 27. It should be pointed out that although 1,700,000 men were entered in the electoral registers as against 600,000 women, the situation was fairly satisfactory since many registers had been destroyed in the course of the past few years, during the war, the occupation and the devastation caused by the Communist aggressions, and women were not registered until they had reached the age of 25.
- 28. The CHAIRMAN observed that the results so far obtained were very encouraging. She stressed the part played by the Commission on the Status of Women, which had held its third session/the Middle East, in the granting of women's suffrage in Syria, and recalled the progress achieved in Greece, Costa Rica and Belgium. In her opinion, the Commission should continue to emphasize equality of political rights which was the pre-requisite of equality in all other spheres.
- 29. Mrs. JURDAK KHOURY (Lebanon) regretted that her own country was still among those which did not give women the right to vote. The question was, however, under discussion in Lebanon. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had made certain promises to the Commission on the Status of Women when it met at Beirut and there was reason to hope that the existing situation would be remedied.
- 30. The CHAIRMAN also recalled that highly placed persons in Lebanon had made promises to the Commission with regard to the granting of political rights to women.
- (b) Status of women in trust and non-self-governing territories (E/CN.6/137, E/CN.6/138)
- 31. The CHAIRMAN drew the Commission's attention to document E/CN.6/138, which contained information on the status of women in trust territories taken from the annual reports submitted by the Administering Authorities.

- 32. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) remarked that the document was of great interest and admirably put together.
- 33. From the contacts she had made with women representatives of Asian countries, she had come to the conclusion that the great republics of Asia, most of which were of recent origin, had the advantage over the older nations of being able, from the outset, in starting on a higher level in their fight against discrimination because of the strong support contained in the United Nations Charter. It was true that the status of women in some of those countries still left much to be desired but the Pacific Republics were making great headway.
- She wished to draw the Commission's attention to the presence of two Japanese women who had taken a very active part in the political emancipation of women in their country. She recalled that Japanese women were equal with men before the law, but that, in Japan as elsewhere, their effective emancipation was in many cases prevented by tradition and custom.
- 35. Generally speaking, she felt that the method followed hitherto by the Commission and the Secretariat had proved satisfactory and had made it possible to achieve real progress. In particular, they had been quite right in laying special emphasis on the importance of women's political rights.
- 36. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of France, remarked that during her recent visit to the Cameroons and French Togoland she had noted that the indigenous women took a lively interest in every aspect of the political evolution of their country. When it became administratively possible and when education became more widespread, they would undoubtedly be ready to exercise their rights freely and independently.
- 37. The Chairman drew the Commission's attention to document E/CN.6/137, containing information on the status of women in non-self-governing territories.

- 38. Speaking as the representative of France, she pointed out that the French non-self-governing territories at any rate were directly dependent on the Republic, and that it was intended to give them wider political rights. As the Commission knew, women of African origin were already members of French legislative bodies. Senegalese women were participating in the political life of their country with much interest and success.
- 39. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) said that the tables contained in document E/CN.6/137 were not quite complete.
- 40. With regard to the political education of women, several women belonging to organizations which were trying to arouse the interest of women in political questions in territories where they had recently obtained the right to vote, were visiting Great Britain to make contacts with similar organizations with rany years experience in that field. Such contacts could be of the greatest value.
- 41. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) highly commended the report prepared by the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/137). She said that in Alaska women had had the right to vote before it was general in the United States and were ready to assume the responsibilities that would devolve upon them if Alaska were admitted to assume the responsibilities.
- (c) Report by the Secretary-General on the possibility of proposing a convention in the field of political rights of women (E/CN.6/143)
- 42. Miss Sieu-ling ZUNG (China) and Mrs. JURDAK KHOURY (Lebanon) remarked that they had not yet received the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.6/143).
- 43. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) had received the report only Yesterday and had been unable to study it with the attention it deserved.
- th. The CHAIRMAN suggested that in that case, as the question was very important, the discussion of the Secretary-General's report should be postponed until the following day.

- Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) supported the Chairman's suggestion, since in her view the question should be examined with the greatest care. The desirability and importance of such a convention, which would serve as a model for States which had not yet granted equal political rights to women, were obvious.
- 46. Turning to another subject, she wondered whether the Commission might not consider the status of women belonging to racial and other minorities as well as the status of women in trust and non-self-governing territories.
- Mrs. MENON (Secretariat) pointed out that the Commission on the Status of Women could not deal with the question of minorities, which was within the competence of the Sub-Commission on Protection of Minorities and Prevention of Discrimination, a subsidiery organ of the Commission on Human Rights.
- 48. Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) said she had meant to refer to the political rights of women belonging to minorities rather than to minorities in general.
- 49. Mrs. MENON (Secretariat) was not certain that she had fully understood the question raised by the Australian representative. A discussion of women living in the metropolitan territory of a State would cover all women, including members of minorities.
- Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) said she was thinking in particular of racial minorities; coloured women, for example, might not enjoy the same political rights as white women.
- Miss SUTHERIAND (United Kingdom) pointed out that no distinction was made between racial minorities and the rest of the population in the questions submitted to Governments. Their replies would therefore provide all the information required.
- Mrs. MENON (Secretariat) noted that if the representative of Australia was referring, for example, to the position of the coloured population in the Union of South Africa, the discrimination applied to men and women alike. The discrimination was therefore on racial grounds and not on grounds of sex, and so was outside the Commission's terms of reference.

- Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) read the text of her delegation's recommendation that the Secretary-General's memorandum on the political rights of women should in future include information relating to Trust and non-self-governing territories.
- 54. In reply to a question by the CNAIRMAN, Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) stated that she was not completely satisfied with the explanations she had received. She would not press the point for the time being, but reserved the right to raise the question when the Commission considered the problem of education.
- 55. Mrs. CASTILLO LEDON (Nexico) drew attention to a mistake on page 8 of the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.6/143) where it was stated in sub-paragraph (d) that the regional convention on the granting of political rights to women had been signed by three members of the Organization of American States, but ratified by none of them. She was in a position to state, however, that fourteen States had signed the convention and four had ratified it.
- (d) Effective programme for political education for women who have recently acquired the right to vote (E/CN.6/141 and E/CN.6/NGO.1)
- Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) drew the Commission's attention to the pamphlet "The Political Rights of Women", published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. She thought that later editions of that excellent pamphlet might be expanded; in particular, they might include the data collected by the Secretariat on the position of women in non-self-governing and trust territories. The pamphlet contained a table which gave a clear and comprehensive picture of the position in the various countries. The method was a good one and she thought the Commission might make use of it in the documents it prepared.

- Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) agreed with the United States representative regarding the excellence of the pamphlet. She said that she had asked for a large number of copies for circulation in her country. With regard to the question before the Commission, she said that in Greece instruction in civics was included in school curricula. There were courses on civics in elementary schools and in secondary schools civics was taught in connexion with the history courses. Moreover, by Circular Mo.77586 of the Minister of Education in September 1949, special attention had been given to the necessity for political education, so that it should be adopted as a special course in all classes. With regard to women in particular, after the promulgation of the legislation extending broader franchise to women, women's organizations had launched a large-scale compaign of political education using pamphlets, articles in the press and lectures.
- Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) associated herself with the other members of the Commission in congratulating the Department of Public Information on the interesting pamphlet it had published. Nevertheless, she wished to correct an error which had crept into it. The pamphlet said that in Australia women had not enjoyed equal political rights until after the first World War. The correct date was in fact 1908. She trusted that the correction would be made in subsequent editions of the pamphlet, which she also hoped would include tables showing briefly and clearly the history and evolution of the problem of equal political rights for women in the various countries.
- 59. Mrs. SEN (India) also paid tribute to the Department of the Secretariat which had prepared and published the pamphlet on the political rights of women. She hoped that future editions of the Secretary-General's Memorandum on constitutions, electoral laws and other legal instruments relating to the political rights of women (A/1163) would be expanded and that, in particular, mention would be made on page 13 of the document, which dealt with the situation in India, of recent changes in that field.
- 60. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) drew the Commission's attention to paragraph 9 of document E/CN.6/141. That paragraph mentioned Economic and Social Council resolution 154 (VII), which requested the Secretary-General

"to continue the collection of information" and "to give favourable consideration to measures for technical advice". It would appear from paragraph 8, however, that no requests for technical advice had been received from governments, non-governmental organizations or individuals. In the circumstances, she wondered whether the Secretary-General could usefully continue to collect material for which there had been no demand. Steps might be taken to disseminate more widely the information collected by the Secretariat and to make it known that the material was available to non-governmental organizations and individuals.

- 61. Mrs. MENON (Secretariat) said that the Secretary-General was always ready to act on any ideas which the Commission might offer regarding ways in which the material should be published in simple form for mass circulation.
- Miss ARNOLD (World's Young Women's Christian Association) said that the organization she represented was gratified that the Commission's agenda included the problem of drawing up an effective programme for political education for women who had recently acquired the right to vote. Her organization had submitted a statement of its views on that matter (E/CN.6/NGO.1). The World's Young Women's Christian Association had emphasized the need to envisage the concerns and needs of all the women of the community without any distinction whatever or other divisive factors which might cause the interests of any particular group to become the motives of education and action. She was aware of the importance attached by the Commission to co-operation with non-governmental organizations, and thought that governments should be reminded of the importance of drawing upon the experience of the women's voluntary organizations which had specialized in political education.
- As regarded the proposed educational programmes, she thought that an appeal should be made to women's practical capacity for dealing with social problems. There was therefore an urgent need for fundamental education with social and political content that was related to the actual life situation of women.
- 64. Finally, the World's Young Women's Christian Association thought that experiments might be made in the use of broadcasting as a medium for the political education of momen.

- Miss PEDERSEN (Denmark) thought that the statement of the World's Young Women's Christian Association was of great value and interest to the Commission. She did not, however, agree with the suggestion made in paragraph 2 on page 1 of document E/CN.6/NGO.1 regarding the importance of drawing on the experience of women's voluntary organizations which had specialized in the political education of women. The experience of all women's organizations engaged in that field would be valuable, and all women's voluntary organizations interested in that problem should, therefore, be enlisted regardless of whether they had specialized in the subject in which the Commission was currently interested.
- 66. It would be dangerous to lay down that the field of essential interest to women in public life was the social field; such an attitude might limit women's public activities.

- organization's statement in relation to paragraph 10 of the Secretary-General's report. The International Alliance of Wemen thought that although it was natural for women's organizations to take an interest in the political education of women, that principle should not be accepted as a hard and fast rule meaning that women's political education should be separate from that of men. Her organization also agreed that the political activities of women should not be restricted to the social sphere only.
- Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) expressed appreciation of the statement submitted by the World's Young Women's Christian Association. It was an example of that co-operation with non-governmental organizations which was so desirable. The political education of women should be the concern of voluntary organizations and not of governments. Countries in which women had only recently won the vote were in a different position from those where women had been voting for some considerable time. In the former case, the interest of the majority of women in their civic responsibilities could be awakened by showing them the connexion between politics and their daily life and work.

/That was why

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That was why it was better to begin by directing their attention to social affairs and the daily problems with which women were familiar and which they could help to solve effectively. It was in that way that the women's voluntary organizations in Great Britain had developed women's interest in public affairs. Although it was true that women's activities should not be confined to the social field only, it was nevertheless a fact that by first directing women's attention to that field, their interest and sense of responsibility would be stimulated, so that they would realize the importance of the vote, which they would then be able to use with greater appreciation of its value.

- Mrs. CARTER (International Council of Women) thanked the Commission for the way it had welcomed the representatives of the non-governmental organizations. The International Council of Women had noted with great satisfaction that the problem of the political rights of women had acquired political rights, the other social and economic rights were much easier to obtain. The Commission should, therefore, give that vital problem its most earnest consideration. It should try to find a way to make the political rights of women a living reality, by drawing up a special convention guaranteeing all women, without discrimination, equal rights with men. When women had acquired political rights, which would be proclaimed in a convention binding on governments, their struggle for equal economic and social rights would be much easier.
- 70. Miss McCORI INDALE (Australia) thought that the Commission might well study the best methods of disseminating the material collected on that subject by the United Rations Secretariat. She was sure that the women's non-governmental organizations would be encouraged and assisted in their work, if they could study the experience of other countries in that field, particularly recent experience.
- 71. Mrs. URDANETA (Venezuela) recalled that the Venezuelan delegation had suggested the year before that the Secretariat should publish the information which it received in the form of a pamphlet to be distributed to women's organizations in Member countries. In order to facilitate the work of the Secretariat,

/each delegation

each delegation represented on the Commission was to have prepared a list of women's organizations in its country, indicating the address of their principal officers.

- 72. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) suggested that the UNESCO Secretariat should ask/whether it could supply countries which needed it with supplementary information on the use of the franchise by women and on the various techniques which women's organizations could use in their programmes of civic and political education; in particular, it would be useful to suggest methods of organizing courses on methods of voting, parliamentary procedure and participation in elections, on the lines of those run by the Federation of Women Voters.
- 73. Mrs. JURDAK KHOURY (Lehanon) said in the same connexion that she was surprised that the effective programs of political education contemplated was intended only for women "who had recently sentired the right to vote" and asked whether it might not also be advisable to consider the needs of women who did not yet have the vote.
- 74. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) thought that the representative of one of the States in which women had only recently acquired the right to vote might be consulted on that point.
- 75. Mrs. Morales (Costa Rica) said that it would be difficult to use the experience of Costa Rica as a guide in the political education of women. That country had been fortunate in possessing for many years an educational system which was extremely advanced in all respects, so that from the day on which Costa Rican women had been given the vote, they had been quite naturally prepared to accept the responsibilities inherent in that right.
- 76. Hiss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) explained in reply to the representative of Lebanon that the programme in question was limited to women who had recently acquired the right to vote because the resolution adopted by the Commission, at its first session, had provided that the

/Secretariat

Secretariat should act: "as a clearing house for the collection and disseminated of information and publications on the use of the franchise for the benefit of women who have recently acquired the vote". She added that in using that formula, the Commission probably had in mind the difference between the roles of women's organizations still fighting for the vote and those which faced the task of educational work when the right to vote was won.

- 77. Mrs. JURDAK KHOURY (Lebanon) thanked the representative of the United Kingdom for her explanation. She was nevertheless still convinced that women's voluntary organizations in countries where men and women did not have equal political rights would be glad to have the effective programme of political education applied in their countries.
- 78. Mrs. MENON (Secretariat) said that the Secretariat would be able to make the programme of political education for new woman voters available to organizations in those countries.
- The CHAINIAN said that the Commission had held ageneral discussion on all the sub-paragraphs of item 3 of the agenda. Verbal suggestions had been made on each point and it was likely that the members of the Commission intended to submit draft resolutions in the near future. The Commission ought, therefore, to adopt some method of examining such texts. There appeared to be a choice between two methods; the various texts submitted could be examined in a plenary meeting and then referred to a small drafting committee of four or five members or they could be sent directly to such a committee.
- 80. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) observed that it was not absolutely necessary to submit a draft resolution to the Economic and Social Commission on every item of the agenda; the representative of the United States had remarked very appositely at the morning meeting that it would be desirable, at the end of the session, to submit a more complete report than those of previous years.

/She agreed

She agreed and thought that since all the items on the agenda would be examined in detail in the report, the Commission should not submit draft resolutions except on items with regard to which it thought that the Economic and Social Council should take specific action.

- 81. The CHAIRMAN said that she had merely wanted to indicate to members that it would be open to them to submit draft resolutions from that point on. Nevertheless, she believed that on such important items as the question of the effective programme of political education for women who had recently acquired the vote, it was essential to submit a separate draft resolution.
- 82. Mrs. URDANETA (Venezuela), referring to the two methods of work suggested by the Chairman, proposed that the Commission should appoint a drafting committee which would examine the texts proposed by delegations, make any alterations in them which it thought necessary and submit the revised text to the Commission for final adoption. That method would avoid useless discussions and would enable the Commission to save time.

## The suggestion was adonted.

- 83. Irs. CASTILLO LEDON (Nexico) asked whether, if the committee made amendments in a text submitted to it, the members of the Commission would be able to study the original text submitted by the delegation.
- 84. Mrs. PEKTAS (Turkey) recalled that at the previous session the procedure adopted had been as follows: if the Committee had decided to emend the text that had been submitted, it had asked the author for her opinion; she believed therefore that there was no point in the Commission's studying the original text, in view of the fact that if it had been amended, the amendments had been accepted by the author.

85. The CHAIRMAN did not think that the methods of work used in the previous year could be cited as an example, in view of the continual difficulties which the Committee appointed at that time had encountered in its work. In her opinion, even if the author of a resolution accepted the amendments requested by the Committee, it would still be interesting for all members to know what the original text had contained. It would not take much time to study the original text and everyone would thus be able to have a general idea of the Commission's work and feel that she had had a part in every resolution that was drawn up.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.