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AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AND ITS COMMISSIONS  
SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SECOND MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York,  
on Tuesday, 10 April 1951, at 4 p.m.

**CONTENTS:** Organization and operation of the Economic and Social Council  
and its commissions (E/AC.34/1, E/AC.34/2, E/AC.34/3, E/AC.34/4,  
E/AC.34/5, E/AC.34/6, E/AC.34/7, E/AC.34/8, E/AC.34/9,  
E/AC.34/10, E/AC.34/11)

Acting Chairman:

Mr. OWEN

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

Members:

Mr. BRENNAN

Australia

Mr. ALMEIDA

Brazil

Mr. CHANG

China

Mr. DEVINAT

France

Mr. RAJAN

India

Mr. CHERNYSHEV

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Mr. CORLEY SMITH

United Kingdom of Great Britain  
and Northern Ireland

Mr. LUBIN

United States of America

Observers: Mr. CREPAULT Canada  
Mr. MICHAŃEK Sweden

Representatives of specialized agencies:

Mr. LEMOINE International Labour Organisation (ILO)  
Mr. HILL World Health Organization (WHO)

Secretariat:

Mr. YATES Secretary of the Council

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AND ITS COMMISSIONS  
(E/AC.34/1, E/AC.34/2, E/AC.34/3, E/AC.34/4, E/AC.34/5, E/AC.34/6, E/AC.34/7,  
E/AC.34/8, E/AC.34/9, E/AC.34/10, E/AC.34/11)

Mr. OWEN (Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Economic Affairs) said that owing to the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Santa Cruz, the Committee was faced with two alternatives: it could either adjourn or appoint an Acting Chairman.

Mr. LUBIN (United States of America) supported by Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) and Mr. ALMEIDA (Brazil) thought that in view of the importance of the work entrusted to the Committee and the limited time at its disposal, the better plan would be to start work at once. He suggested that Mr. Owen should be appointed as Acting Chairman.

The proposal was adopted unanimously.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN thought that the Committee should hear the views of representatives whose governments had not submitted written statements on the question of the reorganization of the Economic and Social Council and its Commissions; he therefore asked the representatives of Australia, Brazil, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and China whether they would be prepared to submit their views orally on this question as a whole.

Mr. ALMEIDA (Brazil) explained that he had not yet received his Government's instructions on that matter and that he would not therefore be able to make a statement for a day or two.

/Mr. CHERNYSHEV

Mr. CHERNYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) saw no need for a general statement and said that he would submit specific proposals when the Committee examined specific problems.

Mr. BRENNAN (Australia) said that the discussion which was to take place was the latest of a long series of debates during which attempts had been made to increase the effectiveness of the Council's economic and social work. Going back no further than 1950, he recalled that at its eleventh session, the Council had adopted a resolution on priorities and the General Assembly, in its resolution 413 (V), had requested the Economic and Social Council to indicate, when new projects were adopted, which of them could be deferred, modified or dropped in order to ensure maximum efficiency in the economic and social work of the United Nations.

If that was to be achieved the Council would have to adopt certain new methods, the first of which should be to determine the level at which the United Nations expenditure -- and therefore its activity -- on economic and social projects should be maintained.

That proposal would not apply to any exceptional measures which the United Nations might have to adopt to meet emergencies but only to projects financed under the Organization's ordinary budget.

Stabilization of expenditure on economic and social work would have a twofold advantage: it would enable Governments to know for two or three years in advance the cost to them of the United Nations economic and social work; it would also operate to stabilize activity and by that means to control proliferation.

The resolutions on the organization of the Economic and Social Council and its Commissions which had so far been adopted by the Council and the General Assembly were incomplete in that they did not lay down any criteria by which the Council could decide which of the current proposals should be modified or dropped. They had an underlying implication of stability of activity, although that was not expressly stated.

Secondly, the Council should be brought more closely into contact with the United Nations budgetary process. Under the Charter, budgetary control rested with the General Assembly and quite apart from the fact that to alter that scheme would require an amendment of the Charter, it would be undesirable to remove budgetary control from the General Assembly; yet, it would be all to the good, were the Economic and Social Council to be kept more fully informed of the budgetary consequences of its decisions and given an opportunity for discussing them

Rule 33 of the Council's rules of procedure laid down that "a summary estimate of the financial implications of all proposals coming before the Council should be prepared by the Secretary-General and circulated to members". That provision, however, was not entirely satisfactory. In the first place, it was not always possible to submit a complete estimate. As a rule, the estimate contained only easily calculated costs such as salaries, the cost of meetings and so forth, but made no allowance for <sup>common</sup> administrative expenditure which were much more difficult to assess. Secondly, the estimate dealt only with the cost of new projects. Figures were submitted separately and were not related to the over-all cost of the economic and social work as a whole. Delegations could not in practice, during the short time available to them, relate those financial implications to the ordinary budget of the United Nations so as to ascertain the real financial implications of a new proposal.

The successive budgets of the United Nations had invariably included certain appropriations for programmes approved at one time or another by the Council. The Council was informed of the budgetary consequences of new projects but did not know the total budgetary consequences of new and old projects.

The time had come for the Council to introduce a method whereby it would periodically review the full financial implications of its work. A comprehensive budgetary estimate of all expenditure on its economic and social work should therefore be placed before the Council's second session each year. While not being required to approve that estimate, the Council would at least be in a position to examine the financial implications of its work and to adjust its programmes according to the cost of the individual projects and so decide how to allocate its expenditure.

The same principle might be applied to technical and regional commissions which should normally be able to review the financial implications of their work as a whole and include in their reports a section on finance.

No satisfactory system of priorities nor any elimination of non-essential work would be possible unless such a comprehensive review could be undertaken by the Council.

/His third

His third proposal was that work programmes should be reviewed annually. So far, the principal concern of commissions had been to develop their programmes; those were now sufficiently stabilized to enable the commissions to carry out a periodic evaluation of the results obtained in terms of cost, to make the necessary changes and to see how the programmes had been received by the various governments.

While his Government had definite changes to suggest in the operation of the Council and its commissions, its views on how the structure of the Council and its commissions might be amended were fluid.

The Australian delegation felt that the existing system had certain drawbacks, but the conclusions it had reached on the measures which might be adopted to overcome them were only tentative; it was anxious to hear the views of other governments before finally crystallizing its views.

One of the main shortcomings of the present organization of the Council and its commissions was the difficulty of combining technical efficiency with good administration. It would be remembered that there had been two schools of thought when the commissions had been set up; one had wished the commissions to be made up of individual experts, while the other had advocated commissions composed of government representatives. By and large, the trend had been towards appointing governmental representatives to Commissions with the result that there was needless repetition of debates and a tendency towards the lowering of the level of representation.

On the other hand, if all the existing commissions were made up of experts other equally serious problems would arise. While it was desirable that the United Nations should be able to draw on the knowledge of experts, it was equally desirable that the programmes should not be settled until they had been considered by persons conversant with all the activities of the United Nations and a knowledge of the extent to which governments were disposed to carry out the recommendations proposed. Certain bodies had shown a tendency to neglect the political and financial effect of their work or of that done by other bodies in related fields. It had thus become more difficult to co-ordinate their work with that of other organizations working in related spheres.

The present complex structure of the Council and its commissions made it very difficult for the Secretariat to serve them all. The Secretary-General had to be represented at the meetings of the Council and of its subsidiary bodies; as, however, they met so often and in such a diversity of places, senior officials of the Secretariat, who were obliged to attend a large number of meetings, were left very little time for their substantive work. What could be achieved by reducing the number of meetings was illustrated by the fact that the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe, which met only once a year, produced outstandingly good reports and analyses.

The need to attend a very large number of commission meetings also entailed heavy expenditure for the specialized agencies.

The Council's commissions were often responsible for increased expenditure. In their anxiety to produce well documented reports, commissions often instructed the Secretariat, through the Economic and Social Council, to carry out studies and inquiries and to report to them thereon. The effects of such demands were reflected in an expansion of the Secretariat's budget. It was therefore clear that every precaution should be taken before deciding that a given question justified the establishment of a commission.

Some governments had come to the conclusion that the Council should remain in permanent session or should at least meet more frequently. The Australian Government would consider those views sympathetically. It felt, however, that the Council should not meet unless it had an agenda fixed in advance with the necessary documentation carefully prepared.

Provision should be made for committees of the Council to meet before or after sessions. Some commissions might be abolished, and their functions absorbed by the Council or the Secretariat assisted by a greater use of consultants or ad hoc bodies. Other commissions might meet less frequently. The work of the Social Commission, for instance, could be taken over by the Social Committee; the Fiscal Commission and the Transport and Communications Commission could also be abolished as well as all the sub-commissions; the Population and Statistical Commissions could meet once every two years instead of once a year. The reduction in the number of commissions and sub-commissions would not greatly affect the representation of states in various bodies.

/He then

He then read the following list showing to what extent his proposals would affect the representation of States.

	<u>Present representation</u>	<u>Proposed representation</u>
Afghanistan		no change
Argentina		-
Australia	12	11
Belgium	12	9
Bolivia	3	2
Brazil	12	10
Burma		no change
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic	4	2
Canada	12	8
Chile	9	7
China	21	16
Colombia		no change
Costa Rica		-
Cuba	4	3
Czechoslovakia	6	5
Denmark		no change
Dominican Republic	1	no change
Ecuador	5	3
El Salvador		no change
Egypt	7	5
Ethiopia		no change
France	30	24
Greece		no change
Guatemala		-
Haiti	3	2
Honduras		no change
Iceland		-
India	18	12
Indonesia		no change

/Iran

	<u>Present representation</u>	<u>Proposed representation</u>
Iran	3	2
Iraq		no change
Israel	3	2
Lebanon	3	2
Liberia		no change
Luxembourg		no change
Mexico		-
Netherlands	13	12
New Zealand	7	5
Nicaragua		-
Norway	3	2
Pakistan	10	8
Panama		no change
Paraguay		-
Peru		no change
Philippines	8	7
Poland	10	7
Saudi Arabia		-
Sweden	8	7
Syria		no change
Thailand		no change
Turkey	9	8
Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic		no change
Union of South Africa	4	2
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	25	19
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	28	22
United States of America	31	25
Uruguay	6	5
Venezuela	6	4
Yemen		no change
Yugoslavia	10	8

/Mr. CHANG



Mr. CHANG (China) stressed the extreme importance of the task entrusted to the Ad Hoc Committee, which had been instructed to examine the organization and operation of the Economic and Social Council and its commissions with a view to making their work more efficient. The United Nations' work in the economic and social fields was undoubtedly that on which most hope was placed throughout the world. The world was at present passing through a critical period in its history; nevertheless, it was the duty of all to see that nothing was left undone which might help to improve the work of United Nations in the economic and social fields and thus strengthen the Organization and restore the confidence of mankind in the United Nations. The way in which the Chinese delegation intended to examine the matter was prompted by its faith in the United Nations and its wish to increase the Organization's strength.

From the practical point of view, and in order to insure that clearness and accuracy in debate which was so desirable and thus achieve concrete results, it would seem advisable to discuss the matter at three different levels, which were nevertheless very closely related: it would be necessary first to agree in general on certain guiding principles, then to review and reclassify all matters before the Council and, finally, to study the question of a possible reorganization of the Council and its subsidiary organs.

His comments would follow the general plan which he had just outlined.

With regard to guiding principles, the Chinese delegation was in agreement with the suggestions contained in the note by the United States of America (E/AC.34/2); the first five principles defined by the United States delegation were of particular importance and ought to bring forth general agreement. The United Kingdom memorandum (E/AC.34/3) and the statements by yet other delegations also contained interesting observations in that respect. It would therefore be extremely useful if the Secretariat were to prepare a working paper which would tabulate the various suggestions made in that connexion, some of which, such as those of the United States of America, were of a positive approach, while others, such as those of the United Kingdom, were of a negative nature and constituted a criticism of the existing state of affairs. It was to be supposed that that particular aspect of the question would keep the Ad Hoc Committee busy for about two days.

/In addition

In addition, the Ad Hoc Committee might spend about three days in examining and reclassifying all matters currently before the Economic and Social Council. There again the job was of a mechanical nature and the Committee's work would be made much easier if the Secretariat were to draw up a list of all matters before the Council and classify them according to their nature, the time which the Council would have to spend on them, the specialized agencies concerned, and so on. A table of that kind would enable the Ad Hoc Committee to visualize the whole question.

With regard to the reorganization of the Council and its subsidiary bodies, the Ad Hoc Committee ought to concentrate its efforts on the basic elements. He himself had already had occasion to emphasize that a distinction must be made between Council matters which had already been brought before the Council, had already come before a policy-making conference of the Council, and were today a part of the Council's routine and the conference type of matter which required policy decision from the Council. Moreover, it would be advisable to make a clear distinction between the committees and commissions of the Council; the former dealt with matters over which the Council must exercise permanent supervisions, such as, for example, technical assistance, whereas the title of commission ought to be reserved for ad hoc groups meeting in order to carry out a specific job and subsequently dispersing.

With regard to the Council's routine activities, whether in connexion with the examination of reports or co-ordination with the specialized agencies, it had to be recognized that the Council had not acquitted itself as satisfactorily as might have been desired. To remedy that state of affairs, the Council must meet more frequently and complete all its work of a routine character.

/As regards

As regards the other aspect of its work, the Council ought to decide to concentrate its efforts, in any given year, on a small number of important points requiring policy-making decisions. Each question should be dealt with at a short session of the Council, which would be of a policy-making nature; such a session ought not to last for more than two or three weeks and could be held away from Headquarters because of its shortness and the small number of members, whereas the sessions devoted to routine matters would be held at Headquarters. Such a concentration of effort and attention could not fail to yield excellent results, as had been shown by the discussion on the question of technical assistance. Such a concentration of effort and attention was bound to have excellent results, as had been evident during the debates on technical assistance; it would also result in preventing important Secretariat officials from being absent for weeks and then, contrary to all administrative practices, being kept waiting for several days before their special questions came up for discussion.

Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) was grateful to the Australian delegation for producing figures which showed that if certain commissions were wound up, the representation of States Members on United Nations bodies would be only slightly reduced and that in fair proportion.

He wished to add a few comments to the memorandum submitted by the United Kingdom delegation (E/AC.34/3), which was already several weeks old. The views expressed by the United Kingdom delegation were of course the result of a detailed examination of the question; but there was nothing hard and fast about them and the United Kingdom delegation did not intend to insist upon them. He had been pleased to note the assurance given in the written or verbal statements of other representatives that the members of the Ad Hoc Committee had met, not to defend their own proposals down to the last detail, but to carry out an exchange of views in a conciliatory spirit and to perfect a workable scheme which would ensure that the organization of the Council and its commissions was as efficient as possible, and which would enable those bodies to operate in a manner satisfactory to delegations and well adapted to the working needs of the Secretariat.

/Similarly,

Similarly, it was to be hoped that delegations would not dwell unduly on the question whether any particular commission of the Council had justified its existence. The Ad Hoc Committee's task was not to condemn this or that commission, but rather to see whether it could devise better methods of organizing the economic and social work of the United Nations.

With regard to the main problem, the United Kingdom delegation felt that a clear distinction should be made between two stages in the work of the Council. First, there was the collection and objective analysis of facts and the preparation of reports. That was primarily the work of the Secretariat but some outside help was needed and one source of such help was the commissions. The work of the commissions should be complementary to that of the Secretariat. The second stage involved taking policy decisions and that was the function of the Council itself which represented governments. Unfortunately, the present functional commissions were ambiguous bodies consisting of members who were supposed at the same time to be independent experts and to represent governments. Consequently commissions often tended to assume the character of intergovernmental bodies and to act as small replicas of the Councils. That led to confusion, duplication and inefficiency.

One of the Secretariat's duties, among others, was to prepare the basic documents needed by the Council. That was a very important task, for unless the Council received the necessary basic documents of high quality at the proper time, it could hardly give matters proper consideration, or arrive at resolutions or recommendations without undue loss of time. The Secretariat, of course, included many extremely devoted and highly competent officials; however, they were too often obliged to interrupt their work in order to service meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies. When the Secretariat needed external help, it ought to receive it, either through consultants, or by small commissions composed of experts appointed by the Secretary-General.

Such small commissions would be in a better position than bodies of sixteen or eighteen members to prepare really valuable reports. Unattended by publicity, and having no other preoccupation than to do first rate work, they would provide the Council with documents which would enable it to start its discussions in much better circumstances than it could as things were.

On another point, he felt that there was a tendency to make too sharp a distinction between plenary meetings of the Council and meetings of the Council sitting as a committee of the whole. In the opinion of the United Kingdom delegation, the Council could only be justified in meeting as a committee of the whole in two cases. It was right for it to do so when it was impossible for it to deal at plenary meetings with all the questions on its agenda and when it was obliged in consequence to hold several

meetings simultaneously. That was of course regrettable but it could not always be avoided. In the second place, the Council might meet as a committee of the whole when it wished to engage in a double discussion of any item on its agenda; but in such a case, the need for a double discussion could be frankly admitted, a first examination could perfectly well be made in plenary up to the point where draft resolutions were submitted, the question could then be sent to Governments and the debate subsequently resumed. In fact, there was no real difference between the plenary meetings of the Council and the meetings of the Council as a committee of the whole, except that plenary decisions were final, and nothing prevented the specialists who represented their governments in the committees from sitting on the Council itself. In the circumstances, there was no need to wonder whether it would be advisable to make provisions for meetings of the Economic Committee and the Social Committee of the Council in the interval between the Council's sessions. In fact, if the Committees met, the Council itself was in session and it would be better to recognize the fact, since questions could then be finally decided if they were ripe for decision.

Mr. LUBIN (United States of America) wished to know whether, in that case, the United Kingdom representative contemplated holding meetings of the Economic and Social Council more frequently.

Mr. GARREY SMITH (United Kingdom) declared that his delegation had noted with anxiety that the sessions of the Economic and Social Council were at present very heavily loaded. It would therefore seem to him to be preferable to spread out the Council's work over the whole year, with the exception of the months devoted to the General Assembly, thus helping the Secretariat to prepare the documentation and giving governments more time to study the documents. That in turn would enable governments to give the requisite instructions to their representatives, and ease the strain on delegations.

It was essential, as the Chinese representative had suggested, that questions of fundamental importance should be dealt with at special sessions of the Council which would not give rise to committee meetings, but simply to the creation of small working parties. In fact, whenever matters of that nature, such as, for example the question of full employment, were discussed at

/an ordinary

an ordinary multi-purpose session of the Council, an unfortunate result among other things was that heads of delegations who wished to follow the consideration of the matter were forced by want of time to cease supervising the general work of their delegation.

Moreover, if the Council wished Member States to send eminent personalities as their representatives, it was essential that Governments should have adequate notice of the date on which a particular fundamental question would be discussed and should receive the relevant documents well in advance. As matters stood, with Council sessions heavily overloaded, it was practically impossible to do so. That was an important obstacle which must be removed, if the quality of the Council's work was to be improved. It would disappear if provision was made for special sessions of the Council, which would be instructed to study one main subject with perhaps some related problems and which would only need the presence of one or two representatives for each delegation.

Of course, that solution would not make it possible to avoid entirely the overloading which inevitably appeared at the end of the year. Nevertheless, it would appreciably lighten the agenda of the Council's ordinary session and thus bring about some improvement in the situation.

In conclusion, he emphasized that a clear distinction should be made between the preparation of questions, which was the work of the Secretariat and of the commissions, and the taking of decisions, which fell to the Council itself and which should preferably, be carried out at plenary meetings or, if that was impossible, at meetings of the committee as a whole.

After a short discussion on the organization of the Ad Hoc Committee's work, the Acting Chairman suggested that the Ad Hoc Committee should continue to meet at Lake Success, since it was impossible to guarantee simultaneous interpretation at Manhattan, and that the next meeting should be held on Wednesday, 11 April, at 11 a.m.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.

24/4 p.m.