

SUB-COMMITTEE OF TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON INFORMATION

OBSERVATIONS ON BRANCH OFFICES

I. VIEWS OF SUB-COMMITTEE

At its meeting on 1 January 1946, the Sub-committee reached general agreement on the following points concerning branch offices:

that, although it would be preferable to establish the central Department of Public Information before setting up its branch offices, nevertheless it would be advantageous to set up rudimentary branch offices in time for the Second Part of the First Assembly, for the dissemination of information;

that the Department of Public Information should comprise a section dealing with branch offices;

that regional branch offices should be set up in the first instance, and that national branch offices should be set up at a later date;

that regional branch offices might be established in London, Paris, Moscow, Chungking, Cairo and Santiago or Montevideo. It was pointed out, however, that a regional office might also be needed in the United States of America, to cover the national needs of that country, since the Department of Public Information itself would be concerned with world and not local dissemination of news;

that the Department of Public Information should co-operate from the start with the existing Military Information Departments in the occupied countries;

that central directives should be issued from headquarters, but that branch offices should enjoy a certain amount of local autonomy;

that branch offices should in no circumstance become involved in the politics of the countries in which they are situated. They

should concern themselves only with information, and all their work should be carried out on a completely impartial basis;

that the heads of branch offices should be selected for their qualifications rather than for their nationality; that with the exception of the lowest grades, all the officials of branch offices should be regarded as officials of the Secretariat;

that a system of rotation should be established, whereby the heads of branch offices and their staffs would return periodically to headquarters and staff from headquarters be assigned to branch offices;

that the working languages of branch offices should be the language or languages of the country in which they are established.

At its meeting on 21 January 1946, the Sub-committee decided to recommend that continental regional offices should be set up wherever the Secretary-General deemed necessary, and that eventually they should be supplemented by national branch offices. (For arguments supporting this recommendation, see A/INF/W.9, page 2). Mr. Shishkin (Soviet) stated that he wished to reserve his position in regard to the setting up of continental regional offices.

II. STATEMENT BY MR. CUMMINGS OF THE INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF BRANCH OFFICES OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND UNRRA

At its meeting held on Friday, 25 January 1946, at 3 p.m., the Sub-committee heard a short statement by Mr. Cummings on the organization and scope of work of the branch offices of the League of Nations and UNRRA. Mr. Cummings' remarks are summarized as follows:

A. LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Organization and Main Functions

The League of Nations had branch offices in London, Tokio, Paris, Rome, Delhi and Nanking and, while Germany was a member of the League, Berlin. The I.L.O. had a branch office in Washington.

The League's branch offices only covered the countries in which they were situated. No attempt was made to cover the whole world through a system of branch offices.

In the case of the London office, its chief official represented the Secretary-General of the League, both in relation to the public and the press, and in relation to the British Government.

The main functions of the London branch office were:

1. to provide the public, press and government departments in the United Kingdom with information on the work of the League. The head of the office regularly attended all important League meetings for the purpose of keeping in close touch with current activities;
2. to provide the Secretary-General of the League with information on the views of British Government Departments on questions to be dealt with by League organs;
3. to keep the Secretary-General informed on trends of policy and opinion in the United Kingdom, notably with reference to the League of Nations.

The League's branch offices were not concerned with publications, apart from the free distribution of review copies, etc. They kept in close touch with organizations such as the League of Nations Union.

In addition to its branch offices, the League's Information Section maintained correspondents in various countries, particularly in Latin America.

Division of Work as between Headquarters and Branch Offices

The League's branch offices were not autonomous; they acted under direct instructions from the Secretary-General or the Information Section. In certain cases, however, special functions such as translation, devolved on branch offices.

Relations of Branch Offices with Governments of Countries
in which they were situated

The Secretary-General informed the Foreign Office of a country of his intention to set up a branch office in that country. So far as the speaker was aware, no formal agreement was drawn up between the League and the government concerned regarding the establishment of a branch office.

Staff of Branch Offices

The League's branch offices were organized on a modest scale. The staff of the London branch office, for example, consisted of a head, one assistant, and four or five clerical assistants.

The heads of the branch offices were nationals of the country in which the branch office was situated.

All members of the staffs of branch offices were officials of the Secretariat. They enjoyed certain diplomatic immunities and privileges, such as exemption from income tax.

B. U.N.R.R.A.

Organization and main functions

The Washington office and European Regional office in London have information sections. In addition, information officers are attached to UNRRA's missions in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania and Paris (to cover Belgium as well as France). UNRRA's representatives in other countries undertake a certain amount of information work.

The main functions of UNRRA's information officers are: to furnish local populations with information on UNRRA; to provide facilities for visiting correspondents; to report back to London and Washington on the information material received; to issue publications written in the local languages; to report to member countries with a view to showing them how much their supplies are needed and how they are being used.

Relations between Headquarters and Branch Offices

UNRRA information officers are responsible

1. to the Information Divisions in London and Washington for all functions bearing on outside work;
2. to the heads of their respective missions as regards all information about UNRRA supplied to local populations.

Staff of Branch Offices

The information units attached to UNRRA missions consist of about five to seven officials, and of a number of locally appointed employees.

No mission chief is a national of the country in which he works.

Salaries and general conditions of work conform to the standards obtaining in the countries to which the missions are appointed.

Co-operation with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations

UNRRA is anxious to co-operate in the field of information with the Department of Public Information.
