

UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/5442  
18 July 1963

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Eighteenth session

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE  
METHODS OF WORK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Seventh report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and  
Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its eighteenth  
session

1. Under cover of a letter dated 31 May 1963, the Secretary-General transmitted to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions a copy of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly.<sup>1/</sup> In that letter, the Secretary-General drew attention to paragraphs 57 and 58 of the report, which dealt with the question of the introduction of mechanical voting in the General Assembly, and to annexes VIII and IX relating to the same question. In view of the importance which he attached to the matter, the Secretary-General asked the Advisory Committee to examine this particular question so as to make it possible for the General Assembly to consider the problem in all its implications at its eighteenth regular session.

2. In its consideration of the question, the Advisory Committee first noted that there had been general agreement in the Ad Hoc Committee that an electric system for registering votes would have the advantage of speed and that its use would result in a considerable saving of time which would, in turn, reduce the expenses of the Organization and of Member States. The Advisory Committee inquired further into this aspect of the problem and was informed that, whereas roll-call votes require an average of eight and a half minutes and votes by show of hands at least five minutes, no more than one minute would be spent for either type of vote if an electric system were adopted.

<sup>1/</sup> A/5423.

3. As an illustration, it was pointed out that, at the seventeenth session, 141 votes were taken in the Fifth Committee. If all those votes had been taken by show of hands and with maximum speed in, say, five minutes each, the total process would have taken at least eleven and three-quarters hours. In similar circumstances, an electric system would have saved some nine hours. In reality, however, the saving would have been greater because there were a number of roll-call votes.

4. Another factor is that, in recent years, the Secretariat has experienced serious difficulties in counting votes and it is the guaranteed accuracy of the count resulting from the elimination of those difficulties which, in the opinion of the Ad Hoc Committee, would be the second major advantage of having an electric system for registering votes. The Advisory Committee was given to understand that it has become increasingly difficult for secretaries of committees to count votes accurately in very crowded rooms where, in addition to the 111 Members, there are numerous advisers and assistants. In the case of close votes, especially when a two-thirds majority is required, it would appear that the Secretariat is not always in a position to be absolutely sure of the results. There have indeed been a number of instances where votes had to be interrupted and taken again. The fact that an electric system would obviate this difficulty is undoubtedly of the greatest importance. Moreover, the results would be indicated for a sufficient length of time on mural panels to prevent confusion.

5. As an additional safeguard, a recording device would reproduce the individual votes and the totals in as many copies as necessary, and would identify the proposal or amendment voted on by means of a symbol. In the case of roll-call votes, the record units would show how each Member voted (for, against, abstention, no vote), while in the case of what is now referred to as a vote by show of hands, only the totals would be recorded.

6. The Ad Hoc Committee indicated that the electric system of voting would not be applicable to secret ballots as required, for instance, in the case of the election of the President of the General Assembly, and of the members of the three Councils, the International Court of Justice, and the International Law Commission.

7. On the merits of the proposal, the Advisory Committee would be inclined to share the view of the Ad Hoc Committee that the electric system of voting would ensure greater accuracy and save time. On this latter point, however, the Advisory Committee recognizes that there are other elements which affect the duration of General Assembly sessions but the Advisory Committee has not been called upon to comment on this at the present time. In any case, the recommendation which the Advisory Committee would make in respect of the adoption of the electric system is subject to the decisions which the General Assembly will take as regards the order of priority to be attached to this particular item within the over-all budget.

8. In view of the financial position of the Organization, the Advisory Committee would have hesitated to recommend that the experiment proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee should be made at the present time. However, seeing that the installation of the electric system would require certain basic wiring and modifications to floors, walls and furniture, it was felt that it would be advantageous to undertake this preliminary work within the framework of the structural changes to be made in conference rooms and the plenary hall in 1964. If this work were to be done at a later date, the installation costs would be higher and the rooms affected would be out of use for a further period of time.

9. Given all the circumstances, the Advisory Committee recommends that, should the General Assembly decide to approve the suggestions of the Ad Hoc Committee concerning the adoption of an electric system of voting in the United Nations, such a system should be introduced on an experimental basis for one year in one committee room. Further, because of the technical considerations explained in paragraph 8 above, the General Assembly may wish to consider whether, in addition to the complete equipment of one committee room, some essential work of a preparatory nature should be carried out at the same time in the plenary hall and one other committee room, so as to permit, if the experiment were successful, an eventual expansion of the system without undue expense.

10. The Advisory Committee considered the cost estimates contained in annex VIII to the Ad Hoc Committee's report. On the basis of the information given therein,

it would favour rental of the necessary equipment. Apart from the lower cost, the rental contract would provide that the supplier maintain and modernize the equipment.

11. Should the General Assembly decide to adopt an electric system of voting on an experimental basis and to carry out preparatory work with a view to later expansion, as indicated in paragraphs 9 and 10 above, the costs for the first year would be as follows:

	<u>Complete installation one room</u>	<u>Additional costs for initial preparation of two other rooms</u>	<u>Total</u>
(a) Installation costs:	\$	\$	\$
(i) Modification and addition of conduit . . . . .	5,000	10,000	15,000
(ii) Purchase and installation of cables and wire . . . . .	25,000	-	25,000
(iii) Design, construction and installation of indicator boards, and modification of furniture to house voting control units . . . . .	7,000	14,000	21,000
(iv) Contingency allowance on above items, 10 per cent . . . . .	3,700	2,400	6,100
	<u>40,700</u>	<u>26,400</u>	<u>67,100</u>
(b) Rental and maintenance . . . . .	38,000	-	38,000
	<u>78,700</u>	<u>26,400</u>	<u>105,100</u>
	<u><u>78,700</u></u>	<u><u>26,400</u></u>	<u><u>105,100</u></u>

12. In subsequent years, the charges for rental and maintenance of the equipment in the room with a complete installation would amount to \$16,000 per annum.

13. As will be seen from paragraph 11, the cost of such a project in 1964 would be \$105,100. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 37 of the foreword

to the budget estimates for 1964<sup>2/</sup> that it is the Secretary-General's intention to include in the revised estimates for section 7, which he will submit to the Assembly at its eighteenth session, a provision to cover the cost of the project, taking into account the foregoing recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

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