

GENERAL COMMITTEE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIFTH MEETING

Held at the Capitol, Havana, Cuba, on 17 December 1947 at 6.30 p.m.

Chairman: M. Max SUTENS (Belgium), First Vice-President

The CHAIRMAN opened the meeting by proposing a ruling that meetings of the General Committee were private and that at the close of each meeting an official communique approved by the Chairman should be issued to the press by the Executive Secretary. This would be the only information on the meeting issued to the press.

This was agreed.

1. PARTICIPATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE (document E/CONF.2/BUR/13)

The EXECUTIVE SECRETARY explained that, after the discussion of this question in the General Committee, he had spoken with the representatives of the non-governmental organizations who had all expressed a certain dissatisfaction with the decision. He had explained to the International Chamber of Commerce, with regard to its suggestion concerning the procedure for speaking at meetings, that he considered it already covered in the original arrangements and further that he considered it premature to question the arrangements before they had been tested. However, the non-governmental organizations had asked for an official interpretation of the arrangement by the General Committee.

Mr. COLBAN (Norway) Chairman of Committee VI, said that he also had already had occasion to point out to the representative of the International Chamber of Commerce that the last paragraph of their letter was covered by the arrangement.

Mr. WILCOX (United States) suggested that the President of the Conference should communicate to the non-governmental organizations the decision of the General Committee in this sense.

Mr. HOLMES (United Kingdom), questioned whether a possible undesirable precedent were not being established by not adhering strictly to the Rules of the Economic and Social Council, which provide that non-governmental organizations should submit their views and documents to a consultative committee.

/The EXECUTIVE

The EXECUTIVE SECRETARY explained that the Consultative Committee of the Economic and Social Council was peculiar to the Council itself and that the Economic and Social Council Report provided that consultation by the Commissions of the Council with non-governmental organizations should normally be direct. Therefore, if the arrangement for consultation agreed to in the General Committee were adhered to on the grounds of assimilating the Conference to the Commissions of the Council, there would be no precedent.

It was agreed that the last paragraph of the letter of the International Chamber of Commerce was acceptable to the General Committee in that it was already covered by the arrangements for consultation and that the President of the Conference would inform the non-governmental organizations to this effect.

2. PUBLICITY OF SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS. COMMUNICATION RECEIVED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE FROM THE CUBAN DELEGATION.

(document E/CONF.2/BUR/14)

Dr. GUTIERREZ (Cuba), moved a reconsideration of the decision taken at the last meeting of the General Committee and a return to the procedure for press releases regarding sub-committee meetings which had been followed before the decision was taken. If it were necessary to amend Rule 47, he considered that this should be done.

The CHAIRMAN, in order to channel the discussion, asked that those delegates who had specific complaints against the old system speak first.

Mr. RICHARD (France), Mr. COLBAN (Norway), Chairman of Committee VI and Mr. STUCKI (Switzerland), Vice-President, cited specific incidents of inaccurate reporting.

Mr. ABELLO (Philippines) Vice-Chairman of Committee II, suggested that the question was whether the rule should be maintained or not.

Mr. TINOCO (Costa Rica), Vice-President, supported Dr. Gutierrez.

Mr. CHARLONE (Uruguay), Chairman of Committee IV, stated that he would be in favour of revising Rule 46, which provides that sub-committee meetings should be private, as he considered it the cause of the difficulty. He believed that, since the most important work of the Conference was done in sub-committees, they should be open to press and public. Failing a revision of this rule he would support Mr. Gutierrez and Mr. Tinoco in asking for a very liberal interpretation of Rule 47 and the issuance of detailed communiques regarding sub-committee meetings.

Mr. ABELLO (Philippines), Vice-Chairman of Committee II, suggested that the letter from the Cuban delegation be considered as an amendment and referred to a sub-committee to discuss and report to a plenary meeting.

The CHAIRMAN did not think that an amendment to the Rules of Procedure

/was

was necessary. He considered that the rule could be interpreted as meaning that Chairmen of sub-committees had the right to issue formal communiques when they considered it advisable but that these need not necessarily exclude the issue of routine press releases by the information services of the Secretariat.

Mr. WUNSZ KING (China) agreed with the Chairman and suggested that such communiques be marked "official" and all others "unofficial".

Mr. COLBAN (Norway), Chairman of Committee VI, stated that in his opinion, to give full publicity to sub-committee meetings would be to defeat their purpose and favoured the rule in its present form. He did not consider errors in press releases unimportant and indicated displeasure regarding reports that had appeared in the press concerning the last meeting.

Mr. ABELLO (Philippines), Vice-Chairman of Committee II, considered the Chairman's interpretation of the rule so broad as to make it advisable to consider changing the rule itself.

Dr. GUTIERREZ (Cuba) felt that it was not a question of correct or incorrect quotation in the press which could not be controlled and agreed with Mr. Abello regarding the interpretation of the rule. He suggested that it be altered to read as follows:

"At the close of any private meeting the Department of Public Information will issue a press communique or give an oral report to the press as might be considered convenient. Although this information must be made impartially, it shall have no official standing. Only when a private meeting be declared secret by a decision of a sub-committee, there will not be a representative of the Department of Public Information attending and no communiques issued. The Chairman, subject to the concurrence of the body concerned, if it is considered necessary, may issue official communiques to the press through the Executive Secretary when he sees fit".

Mr. MALIK (India), Second Vice-President, stated that his delegation had always been in favour of open meetings. He suggested that serious consideration be given to referring both Rules 46 and 47 back to a plenary meeting.

Mr. NASH (New Zealand), Vice-President, was in favour of the retention of both rules with the interpretation placed on them at the last meeting. He considered it dangerous for the Conference to be controlled by the press and public opinion and felt that to refer this matter to a plenary session would be unnecessarily time consuming.

Mr. WILCOX (United States) suggested that the new arrangement had not been sufficiently tested as yet and asked the President of the Conference
/to request

to request the Chairmen of sub-committees to issue informative communiques after each meeting.

Mr. HOLMES (United Kingdom) believed that, since the rule had been passed, there was no question of interpretation but only of compliance with it. He pointed out that the rule did not specify who should draft the communiques and considered that it would be perfectly acceptable for the information services of the Secretariat to do so but that it was to their advantage to check with the Chairmen for accuracy.

Mr. STUCKI (Switzerland), Vice-President, agreed with Mr. Colban, Mr. Nash and Mr. Holmes and pointed out that no commercial treaties had ever been signed where the press was admitted to the negotiations. He did not wish the work of the Conference hampered by too great publicity or pressure from the press and hoped that Mr. Wilcox's suggestion would be carried out.

Mr. HAKIM (Lebanon), Chairman of Committee V, also supported Mr. Wilcox's proposal.

The EXECUTIVE SECRETARY wished to reply to some of the charges that had been made against the Department of Public Information. He pointed out that the secretariat could not, of course, accept responsibility for reports appearing in the press which did not originate in its press communiques, and added that the inaccuracies in the communiques themselves had been relatively few, given the numbers issued and the conditions of work. Corrections were always made immediately a delegation so requested. With respect to the charge made against the head of the public information services concerning reports of the previous meeting of the General Committee in the press, he wished to inform delegations that no communique whatsoever, written or oral, had been issued by the secretariat except the four line press release ITO 112.

Mr. COLBAN (Norway), Chairman of Committee VI, accepted the statement of the Executive Secretary.

In reply to a question from Mr. Nash, Mr. WILCOX (United States) explained that the information regarding the last meeting of the General Committee had been given to the press by the press officer of the United States delegation.

The CHAIRMAN stated that three members of the Committee were in favour of the revision of Rule 46, whereas the discussion really concerned Rule 47. He suggested, as a compromise, that it should be understood that there would be close collaboration between the Chairmen of the sub-committees and the Department of Public Information and that the original decision be retained, changing it to read as follows:

"The Department of Public Information would continue to issue press releases but each release should be made up in agreement with appropriate sub-committee Chairman."

/Dr. GUILERREZ

Dr. GUTIERREZ (Cuba) reserved the right to present the case to a plenary meeting.

Mr. CHARLONE (Uruguay), Chairman of Committee IV, stated that if the question were referred to a plenary meeting he would propose that Rule 46 be amended to make sub-committee meetings public.

Mr. WILGROSS (Canada), Chairman of Committee III, stated that he hoped this question would not be taken to a plenary meeting as he considered it would be dangerous for the success of the Conference and he believed the latter to be more important than relations with the press. He was in agreement with the arguments of Mr. Colban and Mr. Stucki.

Mr. WILCOX (United States) asked that his suggestion be put to the committee.

Mr. TINOCO (Costa Rica), Vice-President, suggested the following resolution:

"In carrying out the disposition of Rule 47, the Department of Public Information shall co-operate with the Chairmen of the bodies concerned in drafting the communiques provided for in the Rule, in order to assure the most correct information to the public."

Mr. CHARLONE (Uruguay), Chairman of Committee IV, said that he did not believe that publicity or lack of it would affect the success of the Conference. He considered that its work could be expedited by calling a meeting of Heads of Delegations to determine where divergencies really existed.

The CHAIRMAN put Mr. Wilcox's proposal to a vote. There were ten representatives in favour, one against and four abstentions.

It was, therefore, agreed that "the President of the Conference shall instruct the sub-committee chairmen to make full and informative statements after each meeting in collaboration with the information services of the Executive Secretary".

Dr. GUTIERREZ (Cuba) repeated his reservation.

Mr. CHARLONE (Uruguay), Chairman of Committee IV, explained his abstention on the grounds he had previously stated of proposing an amendment should the question go before a plenary meeting.

Mr. HOLMES (United Kingdom) explained that he had abstained because he considered the resolution too vague.

The meeting rose at 9.25 p.m.
