

First Session of UN's Permanent Social Commission

By Dorothy Lally*

Vital decisions on pressing emergent problems and the necessity for laying the foundation for long-range planning for international organization in the social field faced the Social Commission at its first session as a permanent organization of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Arthur J. Altmeyer, Commissioner for Social Security, is United States representative on the Social Commission.

THE FIRST SESSION of the permanent Social Commission of the United Nations was held at Lake Success, New York, from January 20 through February 4. Established by the Economic and Social Council to advise it on matters in the social field, the new Commission faced heavy responsibilities in setting the goals toward which the efforts of the United Nations in the social field¹ should be directed. Though the 18 representatives on the Commission brought varied and specialized backgrounds to the work of the new organization, they showed increasingly a unity of purpose in their desire to establish a comprehensive social program which will assure the goods and services necessary for meeting the human needs common to all nations.

In addition to these 18 representatives,² nominated by their governments and confirmed by the Economic and Social Council, four specialized agencies also sent representatives: The International Labor Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Or-

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¹For a description of the work of the Temporary Social Commission in laying the foundation for the permanent organization, see Simons, Savilla M., "UN Organizes in the Social Field: The Social Commission," *Social Security Bulletin*, August 1946, pp. 11-16.

²From Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Greece, Iraq, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Union of South Africa, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, United States of America Yugoslavia.

ganization (UNESCO), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The nongovernmental organizations represented were the World Federation of Trade Unions, the International Cooperative Alliance, and the American Federation of Labor. UNRRA was invited to attend, as was the International Chamber of Commerce, but neither organization sent a representative. Dr. Frantisek Kraus of Czechoslovakia was elected Chairman. A member of the Ministry of Social Welfare in his own country, Dr. Kraus was a representative on the Temporary Social Commission and, as Rapporteur, was responsible for its final report. David Wilson, of New Zealand, was elected Vice Chairman, and Henry Hauck, representative from France and Chairman of the Temporary Commission, was elected Rapporteur.

While the meeting of the Temporary Social Commission last May necessarily emphasized future planning, the permanent Commission found itself faced with the need for immediate decisions on social programs already established by the United Nations General Assembly at its recent meetings. Moreover, significant international developments had taken place in the social field. The UNRRA Council, at its Geneva meeting in August 1946, had taken action to terminate by the end of the year all services except those for displaced persons, which are continuing through June 1947. The need for international services continued to be acute, however, and in this emergency the United Nations, on recommendation of the Economic and Social Council, has assumed some of the urgent UNRRA services of an advisory character and has also created a new or-

ganization—the International Children's Emergency Fund—to give special attention to the needs of children, particularly in the devastated areas.

The Social Commission therefore had not only to make recommendations for carrying forward these emergency services but also to initiate plans to meet other critical needs. International action on the housing problem had already been urged by the General Assembly, and the Commission was quick to recognize the need for immediate measures in this field. Equally urgent were preventive and corrective programs to cope with the rising problems of delinquency and crime. The Commission expressed its deep concern with problems of standards of living and measures needed in the field of social security, especially income maintenance. Decisions on all these pressing questions must meet the immediate situation and at the same time lay the ground work for long-range social planning.

Functions of the Commission

Keynote of the general discussion in the opening days of the session was the recognition that the United Nations Charter undertakes to promote not only the international political arrangements that are imperative in bringing about a peaceful world, but also the economic and social conditions among the peoples of all nations that are necessary to maintain such a world. The Charter repeatedly affirms these two fundamental and inseparable purposes—the promotion of peace and the promotion of what we have come to call social security—recognizing that we cannot achieve either unless we achieve both. The development of social security, broadly defined, is essential both to the internal security of each nation and to the international security and peace of the world.

Since most of the members of the Commission had not attended the meeting of the Temporary Social Commission last May, the first meeting was devoted to an exchange of views on the practical ways in which the Social Commission can effectively carry out its responsibilities. The following terms of references in which the Commission's functions were out-

lined in the Economic and Social Council's resolution of June 21 served as the framework of the discussion:

(a) To advise the Council on social questions of a general character, and in particular on all matters in the social field not covered by specialized intergovernmental agencies;

(b) To advise the Council on practical measures that may be needed in the social field;

(c) To advise the Council on measures needed for the coordination of activities in the social field;

(d) To advise the Council on such international agreements and conventions on any of these matters as may be required, and on their execution;

(e) To report to the Council on the extent to which the recommendations of the United Nations in the field of social policy are being carried out.

In the light of this broad mandate, the members set themselves to becoming fully informed on the activities for which the Commission is directly or indirectly responsible. It was decided to deal first with the most urgent problems, particularly those precipitated by the wind up of UNRRA. The members recognized, however, the broad responsibilities of the Commission in the social field. Therefore, while specific recommendations were made for implementing certain decisions of the Commission, no hasty action was taken to set up international machinery in specialized aspects of the social field. The Commission was conscious of the need to avoid initiating activities on a limited basis.

Social Welfare Services

A major part of this first session was devoted to social welfare services. Reconstruction of the devastated areas and social development in other regions are particularly dependent on the existence of essential social welfare services. Other aspects of the social field—health, education, housing, and income maintenance—are partially covered by specialized international agencies already established. Welfare services for the most part, however, do not fall within the function of these organizations and the Social Commission therefore has a special obligation to advance a program of action in this field. Discus-

sion emphasized the fact that emergency and long-range social welfare programs must be initiated immediately if the goal of assuring social security for the peoples of every nation is to be achieved.

As questions developed concerning the desirability of programs in various specialized aspects of welfare services, the interrelation of the different welfare services became increasingly evident. After prolonged discussion of the different services, the Commission unanimously decided to create a special Temporary Social Welfare Committee to consider the whole field of social welfare, to study the problems to be attacked, and to make recommendations at the next session on action the Commission should take in the social welfare field. The resolution stated that the Commission had decided to invite the Committee "to consider not only the setting up of a subcommission on child welfare (including the question of its membership and terms of reference) but also to continue the consideration of the following specific problems:

"(a) development of criteria for use in reviewing requests from the various governments for advisory welfare services.

"(b) formulating and recommending to the Social Commission the manner in which the advisory welfare services and activities of a subcommission on child welfare should be associated with a general long-term program of United Nations activities in the social field, including the question of staff training.

"The Temporary Committee shall submit a report containing its recommendations to the next meeting of the Social Commission."

The countries represented by the seven members on the new Committee, of which Mr. Altmeyer, the United States representative, was elected Chairman, are Colombia, Denmark, Greece, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Yugoslavia.

Transfer to the United Nations of the Advisory Social Welfare Functions of UNRRA

Both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly had directed the Commission to give at-

tention at its first session to the transferred UNRRA welfare services and to make recommendations for permanent arrangements by the Secretariat in regard to these services.

The Commission recognized that, by assuming the urgent and important services of UNRRA in the social welfare field, the United Nations places on its Secretariat for the first time actual responsibility for administering a program of services to the member States. In getting the new program under way, the Secretariat asked the views of the Social Commission on such major policy questions as what countries should be eligible for services, what criteria should be used in acting on requests for services, and how coordination should be achieved with the new International Children's Emergency Fund and with specialized agencies administering closely related programs.

The whole question of the desirability of transferring these UNRRA social welfare activities to the United Nations had been under consideration for several months. In its report of last June to the Economic and Social Council the Temporary Social Commission had urged that the permanent Commission give early attention to UNRRA welfare activities, particularly "the urgent need for finding some way of dealing with important aspects of the work of UNRRA . . . after its work is brought to a close."

The UNRRA Council, at its meeting in Geneva in August, passed a resolution recommending that certain of its social welfare activities be continued by the United Nations. The matter was referred to the Economic and Social Council, which took favorable action on October 1. The Council's resolution, which had been introduced by John Winant, first Chairman of the Social Security Board and at that time United States delegate to the Council, requested the Secretariat to make studies and recommendations on this question, to bring to the attention of the General Assembly any matters requiring its authorization or special financial provision, and to take necessary action; it also requested the Social Commission to consider the problem at its first session and to make recommendations for continued action.

Following this action, the Secretariat presented to the appropriate committees of the General Assembly a detailed report on UNRRA activities in the social welfare field, with suggestions as to the activities considered desirable for immediate transfer. The report was discussed at length in a subcommittee composed of representatives of the countries represented on the Social Commission as well as of four other countries represented on an UNRRA committee responsible for recommending the establishment of an international children's fund. Eleanor Roosevelt, United States delegate on the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee, represented the United States on the Social Commission's subcommittee. The subcommittee agreed on the principle of transferring the welfare services to the United Nations, but there was considerable and extensive discussion concerning the types of service most needed and wanted and the methods of administration to be used by the Secretariat in carrying on these services.

The General Assembly resolution provided \$670,000 for four types of services: expert consultation to governments on welfare services; fellowships for training in social welfare; advice, demonstration, and instruction in connection with manufacture of prosthetic appliances and training of handicapped persons, and also with furnishing demonstration equipment; and furnishing technical literature. The resolution placed considerable emphasis on the responsibility of the Social Commission to advise the Secretariat on the administration of the services.

The General Assembly resolution has significance beyond its provision for continuing the UNRRA activities. It is the first experiment by the United Nations in rendering practical field service to the people of different nations. The development of these advisory services therefore creates an important opportunity to demonstrate tangibly the interest and concern of the United Nations organization itself in meeting human needs through an effective service from the Secretariat.

The Commission recognized that these advisory welfare services will

be the cornerstone of a permanent international social welfare service. The countries represented on the Social Commission stressed the importance to their governments of practical help of this kind from the United Nations. Greece, the Ukrainian SSR, China, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia have already applied for services under the new program. Requests have been received, for example, for the services of welfare experts; opportunities for experienced social welfare officers to visit other countries to study and observe their experience in welfare programs; an expert on the manufacture of prosthetic appliances; and technical publications for the training of welfare personnel.

The Commission recommended to the Secretariat that, while special consideration should be given at this time to providing these services to countries which were victims of aggression, the basic consideration in deciding on requests should be the need of each country for such services. Further detailed questions on how these services should be carried on were referred to the Temporary Social Welfare Committee.

Protection of Children and Adolescents

Another concern of the Commission was the urgent need for promoting international action in the field of child welfare. The Economic and Social Council had specifically requested the Commission to take steps to create a subcommission for work in the child welfare field. In considering the need for this subcommission, the members took into account the recent establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund, and also the fact that the activities of UNRRA relating to advisory welfare services include specialized services for children.

In their discussions, the Commission members recognized that the discontinuance of UNRRA activities had particular implications for the welfare of children, and they were enthusiastic in encouraging speedy action by the International Children's Fund to take over some of the children's services when UNRRA ceases. As the representative from Greece de-

scribed the needs of children in his country, the Commission was well aware that this was only one example of the great need for assistance to children throughout the devastated areas. Representatives from Latin America stressed the need for special attention for children in less developed regions, where malnutrition has long been a serious problem.

The geographical scope of the new Fund is broad, but high priority is given to children and adolescents of countries that were victims of aggression. The Fund may receive the residual assets of UNRRA and will be further financed by voluntary contributions from governments and private sources. To the extent of its resources it will undertake "to finance or to arrange for the provision of supplies, material, services, and technical assistance" for the benefit of children and adolescents. Governments requesting assistance from the Fund are expected to submit a plan of operation, and the Fund undertakes to ensure proper utilization and distribution of its services. Necessary steps will be taken to cooperate with voluntary agencies, which are urged by the Fund to intensify their activities in this general field.

The Fund's program and its major policies, including allocation of funds, will be determined by an Executive Board, composed of representatives of 25 governments, and will be administered by an executive director. The Economic and Social Council, on the recommendation of the Executive Board, may designate other governments as members of the Board. The Council will be responsible for developing the principles in accordance with which the program will be planned and operated.

The Secretary - General of the United Nations will provide the staff and facilities for administering the Fund. Close relationships will likewise be maintained with the specialized agencies. All steps will be taken to keep separate personnel requirements to a minimum.

The Executive Board of the Fund has already had its first meeting, the necessary machinery has been set up, and program plans are moving ahead. A report to the Economic and Social

Council at its February meeting presented the recommended program and the proposed budget for 1947. The Fund's financial resources will largely determine its effectiveness.

The Social Commission received a special report from the Fund and heard a description of its activities and plans from the new executive director. The Commission passed a resolution approving the report and recommending to the Economic and Social Council the principles to govern the new organization. The resolution also urged the Executive Board of the Fund to seek an advance from UNRRA residual funds so that there may be continuity of operations when the UNRRA supplies are discontinued. The resolution emphasized that, in developing the program, the Fund should give priority to supplementing essential food and other supplies for children, reestablishing children's services destroyed by the war, and cooperating with other organizations in training health and welfare personnel in children's work. Other important principles endorsed by the Commission are intended to assure efficient administration. The Fund will engage in activity in any country only in consultation with the government concerned. Appropriate relationships with other relief and service organizations, both international and national, are required. The governments requesting assistance must submit detailed information on need and methods of administration.

In addition to endorsing the new Children's Fund, the Commission agreed to the transfer to the United Nations of the child welfare activities of the League of Nations. These League services had been divided into three main categories—documentation, research, and consultation. In inviting the Secretariat to assume these functions the Commission stressed that the United Nations approach to the field of child welfare should be a broad one. It was felt that the work of the League of Nations in this field had suffered from too narrow a program of study.

In discussing the desirability of creating a subcommission on child welfare, the Commission members concluded that they were not prepared as yet to make a final decision

on this question. They preferred to refer the question to the Temporary Social Welfare Committee "to determine the best possible method of providing work in the field of child welfare and in particular to look into the questions involved in the establishment of a subcommission in the near future." The Committee was advised to consider both the new developments in the child welfare field and also the activities of international agencies functioning in the fields of health, education, labor, and other fields vitally affecting the welfare of children.

The Commission emphasized clearly in its decisions the responsibility of the Secretariat to provide immediately the necessary advisory services in a child welfare program and to initiate a proper research program; it also made recommendations on other aspects of welfare services. The subject of crime prevention and treatment of offenders was discussed at length, and it was decided to refer this function to the appropriate section of the Secretariat. The interrelationship between this program and other preventive measures in the social field was emphasized, and the Secretariat was encouraged to prepare a comprehensive report for a future session of the Commission indicating what international action is required and how such action can be carried out most effectively. The Secretariat was also invited to recommend suitable measures for the campaign against traffic in women and children and the prevention and suppression of prostitution. The Commission likewise recommended that the Conventions developed by the League of Nations on these questions be transferred to the United Nations. At its next session the Commission will study the 1937 draft Convention after amendments have been proposed by the Secretariat.

Training of Social Service Personnel

There was unanimous agreement among Commission members that improvement of all welfare services will depend largely on the existence of specially trained administrative staff. Such personnel, the Commission stressed, "must be trained in organizing, carrying out and drawing up wel-

fare programs including assistance to families, child welfare, youth guidance, vocational advice, recruiting and placement of workers, medical services, psychiatric services, the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders, assistance to certain special groups (the aged, the young, the physically or mentally handicapped), rehabilitation programs for the handicapped and services in connection with income maintenance programs."

The Commission urged that qualified technicians be included in the headquarters staff at Lake Success and that supplementary staff be assigned to furnish advisory services to the governments and also to international welfare organizations such as the International Children's Emergency Fund.

Recommendations received from the Secretariat for an international training program were referred to the Temporary Social Welfare Committee for detailed consideration. The Commission, however, stressed that priority should be given to developing the emergency aspects of the work—including the fellowship program taken over from UNRRA, consultation to governments on the development of training programs, and supplying technical literature. It was agreed that the Secretariat should take over the functions of the League of Nations in regard to the training of qualified social service personnel. The Commission emphasized, however, that the Secretariat should assume a more affirmative role and that a long-range training program should include not only the type of study such as the League of Nations had developed but likewise active assistance to governments in the development of training programs and the establishment of a permanent plan for the international exchange of welfare officials and students and instructors in schools of social work.

Housing and Town Planning

Another responsibility placed on the Social Commission by the Economic and Social Council was that of considering the desirability of setting up international machinery in the field of housing and town and country planning. Statements of the

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A historical survey of the development of British health insurance which attempts to determine, first, the extent to which the program has been successful in providing the worker with payments during sickness and disablement, and second, the contribution of the medical provisions toward improving the general health of the community. Written in 1938, the book is mainly concerned with the prewar administration and financing of cash and medical benefits, and does not consider the legislation enacted in 1946.

HORHAUS, R. A. "Compulsory Cash Sickness Benefit Plans—Some Practical Problems." *The Monitor*, Buffalo, N. Y., Vol. 33, Dec. 1946, pp. 1-2 ff. \$1 a year.

Discusses amount of benefit in relation to wages, the length of waiting period, claim administration, and the advantages of various types of systems.

MOUNTAIN, JOSEPH W. "Participation by State and Local Health Departments in Current Medical Care Programs." *American Journal of Public Health*, New York, Vol. 36, Dec. 1946, pp. 1387-1393. 50 cents.

Enumerates areas in which public health personnel could participate in the administration of medical services.

MUGFORD, T. H. "Disability Insurance in California." *Personnel Journal*, New York, Vol. 25, Jan. 1947, pp. 222-227. 75 cents.

Outlines the program.

"No." *British Medical Journal*, London, No. 4485, Dec. 21, 1946, pp. 947-948. 1s. 6d.

Comments on the poll of the British medical profession which resulted in a decision not to enter into negotiations with the Ministry of Health on regulations concerning the new medical service.

PRICE, LEO. "Health—Labour's Con-

cern." *Public Affairs*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Vol. 10, Dec. 1946, pp. 11-17.

A survey of union-sponsored health programs.

RESEARCH COUNCIL FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY. *Cash Sickness Compensation in Rhode Island*. Chicago: The Council, 1946. 8 pp. (Publication No. 20.)

Considers the program's financial experience and comments on changes in the law enacted in 1946.

U. S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS. *Workmen's Compensation and the Protection of Seamen*. Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946. 93 pp. (Bulletin No. 869.) 20 cents.

Reports on the protection afforded, under both domestic and foreign legislation, to merchant seamen who are disabled because of injury or disease, and examines the possible effects of a proposed workmen's compensation program for American seamen.

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various delegates brought out the urgency of the world-wide housing crisis. The great need in the devastated areas is obvious, but there was also general recognition that the problem, in one or another form, is acute in practically all nations. It was agreed that, while housing and town planning have important economic implications, housing is fundamentally a social problem. After consideration of various methods of international action in this field, it was finally decided to recommend that a housing and town-planning service be set up within the UN Secretariat; this service would include among its functions the collection and dissemination of legal, economic, financial, and technical documents relating to housing and town planning. The Secretariat would also have responsibility for preparing a draft declaration of principles by the United Nations on these questions. It was suggested that the Secretariat, on the initiative of the Economic and Social Council, make plans for an international conference of experts. The conference would emphasize the exchange of experience concerning building techniques and the production of building materials, and representatives should include experts in building and town planning, representatives of public housing and town-planning bodies, and

representatives of trade-unions of workers engaged in the building trades.

While the proposed housing and town-planning service would be established in the Department of Social Affairs, the resolution advocated that the new service maintain proper liaison with UN's Department of Economic Affairs on questions falling within the competence of that department, and that it also enlist the assistance of specialized agencies, such as the ILO, UNESCO, FAO, and WHO, and of nongovernmental organizations as well.

Future Activities of the Commission and the Secretariat

Because of its conviction that action in such areas of the social field as standards of living and social security was the next important step to be taken, the Social Commission requested the Secretariat to present at the next session specific information on any studies made by the ILO or other specialized agencies and to submit recommendations on appropriate steps to be taken by the Social Commission. The report is to focus on questions relating to standards of living, including an analysis of the feasibility of establishing methods for measuring the standard of living. In addition the report will bring together information on social security in var-

ious countries, taking into account family allowances, social insurance, and social assistance, and other specific measures for ensuring a minimum family income.

In response to the interest expressed by the Latin-American countries, the Commission adopted a resolution specifically requesting the Secretariat to study the problem of standards of living in underdeveloped countries and to prepare recommendations for action on the solution to such problems. In the same resolution the Commission declared that the Secretariat should be prepared to give advisory assistance to governments or regions in their efforts to raise the standard of living.

In expressing its interest in the problem of persons disabled by the war, the Commission asked the Secretariat to study and report on activities of various agencies dealing with the care and rehabilitation of disabled and handicapped persons and also to recommend action to be taken by the Commission.

The next meeting of the Social Commission is tentatively scheduled for the end of July. The agenda for the next meeting are already under discussion. The emphasis will again be on furthering an international program of practical aid to governments in developing services which vitally affect the well-being of their people.