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Some Reflections on the Plenipotentiary Conference Buenos Aires

(3 October - 22 December 1952)

The quinquennial Plenipotentiary Conference of the Union, convened under the Convention of Atlantic City, was formally opened by the President of the Argentine Republic, General Juan Peron, in Buenos Aires on 3 October, 1952. Delegates from 83 countries attended, the largest number of countries ever to be represented at an International Telecommunication Union conference.

Before the delegations arrived an immense amount of work had been done by our hosts to adapt, for the purposes of the conference, a large part of the new and magnificent building of the Law Faculty of the University of Buenos Aires on the outskirts of the City adjoining the famous Palermo Park. Throughout the conference, the host Administration and the Reception Committee worked hard and unremittingly to ensure the comfort and welfare of the delegations, and all the various needs, and they were many, were met. On the lighter side, the Committee were equally indefatigable in arranging excursions to places of interest in the vicinity of Buenos Aires nearly every week-end as well as numerous evening and other entertainments. The thanks of the delegations are due to the Argentine Government who generously transported the whole conference across Argentina, and maintained it royally for a week at Mendoza and later for a long week-end at Mar del Plata. These tours, which were superbly organized, enabled the visitors to see something of the magnificent and beautiful country of Argentina, and were deeply appreciated. The name "Mendoza" will always recall the beautiful town set in a flowery oasis at the foot of the Andes, and the gay and tuneful gatherings of delegates free for a short time from their conference responsibilities. The informality of the occasion and the beautiful surroundings enabled delegates to get to know each other and did much towards ensuring the final success of the conference.

Organization of the Conference

After the formal opening delegates quickly settled down to work and to deal with the many and varied problems which had arisen since Atlantic City. Eight main Committees and several sub-committees and Working Groups were set up as follows:—

	<i>Chairman</i>
Committee 1 — Steering Committee (Chairmen of Committees)	Argentina
Committee 2 — Credentials Committee	United Kingdom
Committee 3 — Convention Committee	Portugal
Committee 4 — General Regulations Committee	USSR
Committee 5 — Finance Committee	India

Committee 6 — Conference Budget Committee	Brazil
Committee 7 — Relations with United Nations and Specialized Agencies	United States of America
Committee 8 — Editorial	France

The following sub-Committees and Working Groups were set up:

<i>Committee 3</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
Sub-Committee A	Articles 6 and 9 (International Frequency Registration Board and General Secretariat)	Denmark
Working Group 1	Article 8 (Consultative Committees)	Switzerland
2	Articles 10 and 11 (Plenipotentiary and Administrative Conferences) and Article 5 (Administrative Council)	United Kingdom
<i>Committee 4</i>		
Sub-Committee A	Part II of General Regulations (Consultative Committees)	Mexico
Working Group	Rules of Procedure for Conferences	Argentina
Working Group 1	Chapter I, II, III and IV General Regulations (Rules for convening conferences)	France
Working Group 2	Annex II: Definitions of terms used in Convention	France
<i>Committee 5</i>		
Working Group 1	Examination of accounts	Czechoslovakia
Working Group 2	Staff Questions	Belgium
Sub-Working Group	Staff Questions	Canada
Working Group 3	Arrears of contributions and debts	Sweden
Working Group 4	Documents	Lebanon
Working Group 5	Budget	Czechoslovakia
Working Group 6	Article 14 (Finances of the Union)	United Kingdom
<i>Committee 6</i>		
Working Group 1	Conference expenses (including use of Russian at Buenos Aires)	United States Territories

The first week or two was occupied with Plenary sessions at which the important questions of representation were decided and at which a Resolution, endorsing the Agreement reached at the Extraor-

dinary Administrative Radio Conference of 1951, was adopted.

The discussions about the Extraordinary Administrative Radio Conference Agreement and the future of the International Frequency Registration Board showed the great importance of matters concerning radio.

After discussing a proposal that it should consider what was achieved by the Extraordinary Administrative Radio Conference (Geneva 1951) the Plenipotentiary Conference confined itself to endorsing the work of the Radio Conference by a Resolution in these terms:

“That any provision of the Extraordinary Administrative Radio Conference which might be considered as conflicting with provisions of the Atlantic City Radio Regulations or with the Resolution ‘Relating to the Participation in the Provisional Frequency Board of Members of the International Frequency Registration Board’, should be considered as superseding those provisions of the Regulations and of that Resolution.”

Having decisively rejected a proposal that the International Frequency Registration Board should be dissolved, the Conference turned its attention to the numerous proposals before it regarding the constitution and organization of the Board. The question which gave rise to the most prolonged discussion was whether the number of members of the Board should be increased, in order to make it more representative, or whether it should be reduced in the interests of economy. It must be added at once that the proposals for a Board of reduced size also envisaged means of increasing its effectiveness; and the discussions on this subject served to emphasize the great importance which the Members of the Union attach to the role of the International Frequency Registration Board in the development of international radiocommunication. The decision of the Conference, embodied in a Resolution, was that the Board should continue to have eleven Members as at present. It was also decided that the election of a new Board should not be held in Buenos Aires and that consequently the present membership of the Board would be maintained.

In the revision of the Article dealing with the International Frequency Registration Board in the Atlantic City Convention the present provision that the Board should be elected by the ordinary administrative radio Conference was retained. It was, however, decided that countries, rather than individuals should be elected and that each of the elected Members should nominate one of its nationals to serve on the Board.

Having disposed of some of the more controversial matters, the conference proceeded to deal with the mass of proposals, some 800 odd, which had been put forward for the revision of the text of the Atlantic City Convention (including the complete revision of the General Regulations), the future financial

organization and management of the Union, the vexed question of arrears and debts, the future relations between the Union and the United Nations and the many problems which had been referred to the Conference by the Administrative Council. It soon became clear that if the conference was to complete its tasks by the date for which the Administrative Council had budgeted, the pace of the work would have to be accelerated. The opportunities for reflection and for friendly exchange of ideas afforded by the excursion to Mendoza greatly enhanced the spirit of conciliatory collaboration and, after the return from Mendoza, all delegations without exception, revised their approach to the problems before the Conference by withdrawing a very large number of the less important proposals and voluntarily shortening the length of the discussions. In addition, sessions were lengthened progressively and by great efforts on the part of Chairmen of Committees, Rapporteurs, the Secretariat and last but by no means least, the teams of interpreters, the work of the Committees was virtually completed by the target date, 10 December. Thereafter the Editorial Committee worked night and day to produce the final texts and the new International Telecommunication Convention, Buenos Aires, 1952, was signed with acclamation on 22 December, on behalf of 79 Members and one Associate Member.

Administrative Council

One of the more important tasks of the conference was to elect the new Administrative Council to serve until the next Plenipotentiary Conference. It was decided to adopt the regional basis of selection fixed at Atlantic City and to elect the Members from each region by a vote of the whole conference. The new Council consists of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, France, India, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Spain, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Yugoslavia and the USSR, the new Members being India, Mexico, Spain and Czechoslovakia. The new Council held its first meeting in Buenos Aires under the Chairmanship of Dr. Andrada (Argentina) the Chairman of the Conference.

Revision of the Convention

Few changes were made in the structure of the Convention or in the organization of the Union and its permanent organs. The existing Membership and the conditions for admission of new Members and Associate Members were confirmed, but it was decided that failure on the part of signatory Governments to ratify the Convention within two years from 1 January 1954 (the date when the Buenos Aires Convention comes into force) would involve the suspension of voting rights at conferences and meetings until such time as an instrument of ratification was deposited. The duties and procedural

arrangements of the Administrative Council were more clearly defined and amplified, including specific directions about the fixing of the salaries and allowances of the Secretary-General, the Members of the IFRB and all the officials of the Union, the conclusion on behalf of the Union of provisional agreements with certain international organizations and the United Nations and representation at the conferences of such organizations, and for the regulation and conduct of the work of the Union and its permanent organs. A new provision was included that the Council shall act only in formal session. Certain provisions about the duties of the IFRB, formerly in the Radio Regulations, were included also in the Convention and were expanded to provide that the Board shall act "in accordance with any decision which may be taken by competent conferences of the Union". Various drafting changes were made in the provisions about the Consultative Committees and it is now provided that the Directors of each Consultative Committee and the Vice-Director of the CCIR shall all be nationals of different countries, Members of the Union. The structure of the general Secretariat was not altered but new provisions emphasizing the Secretary-General's overall responsibility for all the administrative and financial services of the Union and the responsibility of the Assistant Secretaries-General to the Secretary-General were included. It is also provided that the Secretary-General and the two Assistant Secretaries-General shall all be nationals of different countries, Members of the Union. The provisions about the duties of the Secretary-General were amplified and clarified. Several drafting changes were made in the Articles dealing with the Plenipotentiary and Administrative Conferences and the classes of Administrative Conferences (Ordinary, Extraordinary and Special) and their functions were clearly defined. The adoption of the Rules of Procedure for Conferences in the General Regulations was made obligatory for all administrative conferences and, where applicable, for meetings of the Consultative Committees but additional rules may be adopted by conferences and the Plenary Assemblies of the Consultative Committees. Important changes were made in the Articles dealing with the Finances of the Union and Languages. The number of classes of contribution was increased from 8 to 14 by the insertion of 5 intermediate classes and the introduction of a new class of one-half of one unit. Accounts for extraordinary expenses will not bear interest until 30 days after the date of despatch. The rules for the use of the official and working languages of the Union were clarified and new provisions were made that at conferences of the Union and at meetings of the permanent organs languages other than the three working languages may be used provided that the Members and Associate Members asking for them pay the whole of the additional cost. A new article (Article 23) was inserted providing for the four sets of Administrative Regulations to be regarded as annexed to the Buenos Aires Convention and to

remain valid until the entry into force of new Regulations drawn up by the competent ordinary, and where the case arises, extraordinary administrative conferences. The provisions regarding safety of life telecommunications were embodied in a new article (Article 36) and amplified to make it obligatory for absolute priority to be given to telecommunications concerning safety of life at sea, on land or in the air and to epidemiological telecommunications of exceptional urgency of the World Health Organization. The list of countries in Annex I was brought up to date and a list of countries eligible for Associate Membership was included in Annex 2. Certain definitions in Annex 3 (formerly Annex 2) were clarified. The whole of the General Regulations in Annex 5 (formerly Annex 4) were revised and new and amplified Rules of Procedure for Conferences, based largely on a text produced by Argentina, were adopted. Additional Protocols were annexed dealing with changes of class of contribution, the arrangements for the possible amalgamation of the CCIT and CCIF (a most important and far-reaching proposal) and the ordinary budget of the Union for 1953 and the level of expenditure for ordinary expenses for the years 1954-1958.

Finances of the Union

Like all other international organizations, the Union is faced with rising costs and the difficulty of making both ends meet. It was essential, if the work of the Union was to continue and to expand, that means should be found by the Conference to place its finances on a sound basis. Moreover, the implementation of the Extraordinary Administrative Radio Conference Agreement involved considerable temporary expansion of the Secretariat of the International Frequency Registration Board, the total cost of which already accounted for nearly a third of the ordinary annual expenses of the Union. The conference tackled these problems with realism and vigour and it is hoped, although it remains to be seen whether these hopes will be realised, that ways have been found of overcoming the present financial difficulties. If it is inevitable that the cost of Membership must be increased, it is more than ever imperative that Members must pay their contributions and their bills for conference expenses promptly. All those countries which signed the Convention, however, have voluntarily undertaken a moral obligation to pay the increased costs of Membership and no doubt they will honour their obligation. The annual level of ordinary expenditure from 1954 to 1958 has been fixed on a sliding scale to take account, in addition to running costs, of incremental increases in salaries and cost of living and other allowances for the staff and for normal development; provision has also been made for financing pensions and the Provident Fund. Offers to pay certain sums owing under the Madrid Convention were gratefully accepted and certain other sums in respect of the debts of former Members under the Madrid Convention

were written off. The Conference passed several Resolutions endorsing various decisions of the Administrative Council about liability for outstanding conference expenses and asking the Members concerned to pay them. An appeal was made to Members which have not yet done so to pay their shares of the sums advanced by the Netherlands Government in connection with the conference which was to have been held at The Hague in 1950. Increases in the salaries of the Secretary-General and Class 8 of the staff of the Union were authorized together with temporary allowances to help to meet the increased cost-of-living in Geneva. The Administrative Council was charged with the tasks of undertaking a re-classification of the duties of the Union staff and also to consider the salary scales in the light of a study to be made by the Secretary-General, and to make proposals, if it thinks fit, for their revision. The Conference gave careful consideration to proposals to revise the financial structure of the Union by introducing a Consolidated Budget and Working Capital Fund but decided not to adopt them. It did, however, instruct the Council to study these questions and to report to the next Plenipotentiary Conference.

Relations between the Union and the United Nations

A proposal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to amplify the definition of Government telecommunications to include the Heads of the Principal Organs of the United Nations was adopted, but another, to revise the same definition to include the Heads of the Specialized Agencies, was not. The conference passed a Resolution providing that if a Specialized Agency, wishing to obtain special privileges for its telecommunications informed the Council justifying the particular cases for which in the opinion of the Agency special treatment is necessary, the Council should consider such requests, inform the Membership of those which in its opinion should be accepted, and take a final decision on the basis of the opinion of the majority of the Members and Associate Members. It will thus be possible to meet cases of special need between Plenipotentiary conferences. As a corollary of the decision not to extend Government telecommunication privileges to the Specialized Agencies, the conference passed a Resolution instructing the Secretary-General to request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to place before the General Assembly the opinion of the Union that Article IV, Section 11 of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies should be revised.

The conference also considered a proposal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations that the traffic of the Specialized Agencies should be carried over the United Nations point-to-point network at special rates. The conference considered that this proposal was unacceptable and passed a Resolution

declaring that, in normal circumstances, the U.N. point-to-point network should not be used for Specialized Agency traffic in competition with existing commercial networks, that the Union did not favour any departure from Article XVI of the United Nations—International Telecommunication Union Agreement and instructing the Secretary-General to invite the United Nations Secretary-General to withdraw his offer to the Specialized Agencies at the earliest practicable moment. Nevertheless, the conference recognised that in cases of emergency Specialized Agency traffic might be carried over the United Nations network either at a tariff composed in accordance with the International Telegraph Regulations, or free of charge.

The whole work of the Union is, of course, designed to facilitate the exchange of messages, private business and press between the peoples of all nations but in order to give special emphasis to this point at the present time, the conference passed a Resolution recommending Members and Associate Members to facilitate the unrestricted transmission of news by telecommunication services.

Conclusion

As a landmark in the history of the Union, the Buenos Aires Conference will not, perhaps, rank with those of Madrid and Atlantic City since no major changes were made in the structure or organization of the Union. Nevertheless it was a memorable Conference for the degree of agreement reached on all major problems and for the responsible, vigorous and realistic manner in which they were solved. The fact that the Conference found it necessary to make comparatively few alterations to the Convention is a tribute to the magnificent work done in 1947 and to the wisdom and foresight of the architects of the Atlantic City Convention, many of them happily able to be present at Buenos Aires. That the new Convention was signed on behalf of 79 Members and one Associate Member clearly demonstrates that it is possible, with a common objective, goodwill and co-operation to achieve agreement and, after 87 years of existence, the Union is now more firmly established than ever through the International Telecommunication Convention (Buenos Aires, 1952).

(Article contributed by the United Kingdom delegation to the Buenos Aires conference - E.M.P. and H.G.L. -)

— The following photographs appear, in the Spanish Section, at the end of the article :

- a) The Law Faculty, in which the Conference was held;
- b) The inaugural meeting (President General Peron delivering the inaugural address);
- c) The inaugural meeting during the singing of the Argentine National Anthem;
- d) Excursion from Mendoza to Potrerillos.