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The Need for Re-organising the UN-System

by Dr Volkmar Köhler, Bonn *

The leadership, as well as the organisational structure and the working routine of the UN in as far as they are mainly concerned with development political questions and international economic cooperation are increasingly coming under cross-fire from critics in all parts of the world. A case in point was the recent Interpellation by the group of CDU/CSU members in the German Federal Parliament. The subject of this parliamentary inquiry was the re-organisation of the economic and social sectors of the UN. In the following article the member of Parliament, Dr Volkmar Köhler, explains why the interpellation was tabled. His explanation is followed by the publication of item number 10 of the inquiry and the reply by the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski.

New York's talking shop", "Theatre of the Absurd" or comparisons with a kettle into "which anyone may let off steam" — these are some of the ways presently applied to draw attention to the state of the UN today. Without identifying oneself with any of these descriptions, and without joining the chorus of those who look upon the decline of the world organisation as an already accomplished fact, one may yet point to a number of aspects of the organisation which are not beyond criticism. This criticism is not aimed at the functions of the UN, about which the opinions vary according to the political and ideological standpoints taken up, but at its organisational structure, whose perviousness and intelligibility or rigidity, respectively, are the measures of its efficacy in action.

If we agree that international organisations are, if anything, best suited to rise above the constraints of dealing with day-to-day problems — constraints to which national governments are subjected — and to apply themselves to questions and subjects which are capable of being dealt with only by acting together in the spirit of enlightened solidarity, then attention focuses on the various functional and organisational units which devise, and take the responsibility for, the UN's economic and social activities.

To do no more than trying to obtain a general view of what quasi autonomous organisations exist apart from ECOSOC and its numerous subordinate bodies, its regional commissions and interstate committees, is a difficult undertaking which has been made easier for the interested observer only through the publication of a report composed by experts. The report is entitled "A New United Nations Structure for Global Economic Cooperation"; it is, for the time being, the final link in a chain of documents and resolutions which have been passed by the World Organisa-

tion since its foundation, all calling, but without lasting effect, for coordinated organisational processes and programmes. The above-mentioned experts' report betrays a certain half-heartedness, too, for, contrary to the original task, its authors excluded such important areas as food and agriculture. And yet it is in these very sectors that a wellnigh intolerable increase in personnel has taken place and where there has been growing inclination to set up organisations for their own sakes. Such institutional innovations as the World Food Council, the Advisory Group for Food Production and Investments in Developing Countries, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Committee for World Food Security would appear to be particularly questionable, not to mention the Advisory Group for Proteins. With all these bodies the question arises in how far it has been possible to convert functions into structures in order to be able to solve defined problems.

As far as we know, these bodies are partly in competition with the FAO, resulting in overlapping of competences and duplication of work. Their cost in terms of money, personnel and equipment is out of all proportion to the contribution they make to development, for in its present state the FAO can hardly be said to be what it should be, i.e. an instrument to secure a maximum production of food and distribute it in the best possible way.

It would surely be a mistake to assume that the Federal Republic of Germany, as a member of the World Organisation, has no possibilities to exercise its influence in favour of preserving and strengthening structures which have proved their usefulness and of dissolving or, attuning to, the world's real needs, those which are nothing but a drag.

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Hitherto, the Federal Government has been tolerating states of affairs which can be objectively described as duplication of work, overlapping of responsibilities, red tape and overstaffing; it has taken no overt steps with the view to setting in motion drastic changes in the organisation and a general re-allocation and re-grouping of its functions such as would correspond to the general notion of member states of the United Nations. In this case the Federal Government cannot even point to numerous declamations as is normal in such situations. It simply persists in a policy of "muddling through", instead of adopting one of "piecemeal" engineering and thus step by step paving the way towards a solution of its problems. The means to do this, and the mandate, are at hand in the shape of an inter-governmental committee set up specifically for the reorganisation of the structures of the UN. It is with a view to clarifying the situation and to finding out what the Federal Government intends to do with regard to this matter that the CDU/CSU parliamentary group as the opposition in the German Federal

Parliament has tabled the above-mentioned interpellation.

Although, in this interpellation we stress the organisational aspects of the problem, we are of course in no doubt that organisational efforts by themselves are not enough, to put an end to grievances; for that it would also be necessary to change political convictions and attitudes. One of the basic errors made in present day discussions about reform is precisely the assumption that improvements can be brought about simply by changing structures. However, the remark is not intended to mean that attempts to effect a structural reorganisation should be abandoned, for it is frequently the existing organisational structures which make it more difficult to change attitudes. It is part of the structural political strength to draw attention to these inter-relationships and to influence developments in a constructive manner. This can also be expected of a state of medium power like the Federal Republic of Germany, which cannot claim for itself to play an independent world political role.

Excerpt from the Interpellation tabled by Dr Köhler and other members of the parliamentary group of the CDU/CSU concerning reorganisation of the economic and social sectors of the UN system:

What concept does the German delegation pursue in the *ad-hoc* Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System and what concrete proposals has it so far submitted to this body for a restructuring of the operational sectors which from the point of view of development policy are particularly important?

The reply of the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski:

The Federal Government, which looks upon the UN as an increasingly important forum for the balancing of the interests of the developing countries and those of the industrial countries, is prepared to support the endeavours directed towards a restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the UN. Its attitude in this regard is in conformity with the objective laid down in the UN Charter of furthering economic and social progress and to achieve an improved living standard for the population of the earth. The planned restructuring offers the possibility of improving the existing instruments for the achievement of these objectives.

The Federal Government proceeds on the assumption that the efforts at reform will of course remain within the framework of the Charter and is of the opinion that reform in the economic and

social sectors of the UN should be realised everywhere where a critical examination would appear to make this for objective reasons desirable. In this endeavour improved efficiency of the World Organisation, the rationalisation and a better functioning of its mechanisms for consultation should be foremost among the objectives. Reforms should be evolved which counter the polarisation of opinions and in the interests of all, make sound solutions possible.

The meetings of the *ad-hoc* Committee have only just begun its discussions on the restructuring of the economic and social areas of the UN and should take several years. In the second meeting of the Committee the leader of the German delegation made a statement of the general principles of our policy in this regard; in his declaration he pointed to the need to strengthen the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC). We pleaded for a limitation of world conferences, held under UN auspices to discuss specialised subjects and at the same time expressed concern about the increase in the number of extraordinary general assemblies. We further welcomed the efforts at tightening up of the working methods of the UN Secretariat as we applauded the greater participation of the regional economic commissions in UN activities in the regions concerned. We stressed the special role of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). More proposals are at present being prepared in cooperation with the EC partner countries, and it is intended to put them forward jointly.