

UN Organizes in the Social Field: The Social Commission

By Savilla M. Simons*

Through UNRRA, many nations have been working together to try to alleviate some of the social disorganization and distress following immediately on the war.¹ The meeting of the Temporary Social Commission established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations is a first step toward a permanent international organization concerned not only with emergency aid to the "socially wounded" but with long-range steps to aid in assuring the peoples of the world the goods and services necessary to meet common human needs.

THE UNITED NATIONS have taken the first steps towards developing a structure for intergovernmental collaboration in the social field. A major purpose of the United Nations, as set forth in the Charter, is "to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character." As a means for carrying out this purpose, the Economic and Social Council was set up as a principal body of the United Nations, with status equal to that of the Security Council and power to establish commissions and subcommissions to advise it on various aspects of economic and social problems. Some of the functions in the broad field with which the Council is concerned will be carried on by specialized agencies created by separate, intergovernmental agreements, such as the International Labor Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the new World Health Organization. These agencies are being brought into relationship with the Council.

The Temporary Social Commission, created by the Council to make recommendations on permanent organization, had the benefit of proposals made by British and American groups concerned with social work and social

security. In the United States, a proposal for an international organization in the field of social welfare was developed by representatives of national private social work organizations after exploratory discussions with representatives of governmental agencies, including the Social Security Board, and the Division of International Labor, Social, and Health Affairs of the State Department. The proposal was presented to the Under Secretary of State in January of this year by the National Committee on International Organization for Social Welfare, operating under the auspices of the National Social Welfare Assembly, and was made available to the members of the Temporary Social Commission.

Temporary Social Commission

Establishment

The Economic and Social Council, at its first meeting in London in February 1946, established the Temporary Social Commission to advise it on international organization in the social field. The Commission was asked to review the present organizations in this field and the problems not covered by them and to make recommendations on the desirability of establishing any new international organization in the social field; to report on the advisability of bringing under the Economic and Social Council the activities in this field that have been carried by the League of Nations and the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission; to assume temporarily—pending the establishment of permanent machinery—the work of the League of Nations on traffic in women and children and on child wel-

fare; and to report on social problems requiring immediate attention.

The Commission was composed of eight members, appointed to serve until March 31, 1947. The members were from the following countries: the United Kingdom, France, Czechoslovakia, Colombia, Peru, Cuba, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Henry Hauck of France was elected Chairman, S. W. Harris of the United Kingdom, Vice Chairman, and Dr. Frantisek Kraus of Czechoslovakia, Rapporteur. Miss Katharine Lenroot, Chief of the U. S. Children's Bureau, served as Secretary of the Commission and was assisted by Miss Alice Shaffer of the U. S. Department of State.

The Commission met from April 29 to May 17 at the United Nations headquarters at Hunter College, New York City. In the opening address, Henri Laugier, Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs, called on the Commission to lay down "a world policy intended to fight poverty and social decadence by improving the conditions of the material existence of the masses and placing at the disposal of all the full wealth of civilization." This broad democratic concept of its purposes dominated the Commission's discussions and decisions.

The influence of modern democratic concepts on the Commission's thinking was evident in its consistent concern with the conditions of life of populations as a whole and its insistence that beneficiaries of social programs participate in formulation of policies affecting such programs. The attitudes and recommendations of the Commission were also marked by emphasis on the interdependence of social and economic policies and the necessity of using economic measures to gain social objectives. This broad approach led to emphasis on the relationship of the social aspects of the activities of other international agencies in related fields to the work of any organization in the social field and the need for coordination. The discussions reflected a dissatisfaction with past accomplishments in improving social conditions throughout the world and a vigorous determination not to be held down by prewar patterns but to start afresh with a bolder approach to social problems of an international character.

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¹ See the *Bulletin*, November 1944, pp. 9-12, and November 1945, pp. 10-14.

Concept of Modern Social Policy

The central core of the Commission's recommendations emerged in its early consideration of the meaning of "social policy under conditions of contemporary society." Because of the varying interpretation of "social policy," "social affairs," and "social welfare," the Commission decided that before it could carry out its assignment it must clarify and define the term "social." The Preparatory Commission of the United Nations had not attempted to limit the scope of this term, declaring only that it embraced "a wide variety of topics."

The Temporary Social Commission rejected the interpretation which associates the "social field" with charitable activities of the privileged classes, as old-fashioned and hurtful to human dignity and to a sense of democratic equality. In the words of the Chairman, "solidarity has been substituted for charity." Furthermore, it was felt that, whereas social work in the past tended to be limited to services for special groups of people, such as the young, the aged, and the disabled, the field must be broadened if effective social policy is to be developed. Dr. Kraus of Czechoslovakia made a vigorous appeal in behalf of a broad concept of social policy, declaring that the social field is no longer concerned only with the care of the "socially wounded"—with a kind of emergency aid to those already injured—but rather with the common needs of all—those in "the fighting lines and not yet wounded."

After intensive work, the Commission agreed to interpret the term "social" as encompassing the standard of living of the entire population, with emphasis on the organization of public administration, so as to assure to the whole population of a country goods and services necessary to meet common needs. As stated in the Commission's report, "The standard to be attained is the well-being of all members of the community." In support of this interpretation the Commission cited a statement in the American proposal for an International Social Welfare Organization which refers to "enabling individuals and families to lead personally satisfying and socially useful lives." Selected for special mention as essential goods and services were adequate housing,

food, clothing, education, health service, facilities for recreation, and "satisfactory working conditions based on freedom of association."

Content of the Social Field

The Commission's approach makes social services for groups with special needs supplementary to basic economic and social measures to raise the general standard of living. Accordingly, the Commission divided the subjects with which social policy is concerned into three main divisions: the standard of living; social services for special groups; and social policy for special regions, such as the war-ravaged countries and industrially underdeveloped countries. The subject matter covered in these divisions was outlined as follows:

I. Standard of Living (Common Human Needs)

A. Components of the standard of living:

Housing
Food and nutrition
Clothing
Health and medical care
Education
Recreation

B. General aspects of the standard of living:

Income and cost of living (wages, earnings . . . family allowances, social security, unemployment insurance, social assistance, family budgets, home management, consumer protection)
Protection during work (working conditions, hours of work, employment of children and young persons, protection of women workers, protection of the health of workers, guarantee of right of organization and right to strike)

Family life (general conservation and protection, marriage, divorce, separation, maintenance, illegitimacy, adoption, guardianship, parent education, family guidance, and welfare)

C. Quantitative and qualitative measures of standard of living

II. Social Services for Special Groups

A. Welfare of children and adolescents:

Maternity and child welfare
Youth guidance
Homeless children, foster care in private homes or in institutions
Protection against neglect and exploitation

Juvenile delinquency—prevention and treatment
Care of physically and mentally handicapped children

B. Special problems of rural population

C. Welfare of aged persons

D. Care and rehabilitation of disabled and handicapped persons

E. Prevention of crime and treatment of offenders

F. Prevention of commercialized vice, rehabilitation of prostitutes

G. Prevention of addiction to, and control of, dangerous drugs

III. Social Policy for Special Regions

A. Underdeveloped areas:

Policies and services in underdeveloped areas
Social problems of dependent territories

B. Countries affected directly by war:

General relief and rehabilitation

Relief and protection of homeless or abandoned children, and other children especially affected by war

Care of refugees and displaced persons
Transfer and resettlement

C. Migration

Basic Principles

Interdependence of social and economic policy.—A statement made by President Roosevelt to the International Labor Conference in 1944 became a keynote of the discussions: "We have learned too well that social problems and economic problems are not separate watertight compartments in the international any more than in the national sphere. In international as in national affairs, economic policy can no longer be an end in itself; it is merely a means for achieving social objectives."

The members from the Latin-American countries pointed out that this interdependence is particularly marked in the nations that are industrially underdeveloped. The members from Peru and Colombia, Manuel Seoane and Gerardo Molina, declared in a joint memorandum that in the underdeveloped countries social problems of the type that had been the concern of the League of Nations in its work on social questions are symptoms of more deeply rooted problems. Illegitimacy, neglect of children and old people, and increase in delin-

quency can be reduced only as the basic problems of low wages, poor housing, and insufficient food and clothing are solved. Social services to prevent juvenile delinquency, for example, mean little as long as the earnings of wage earners are so low that they cannot give their families the necessities of life. Believing that "the great social problems of the less developed countries have their principal origin in their economic weakness" and that "peoples of scanty resources cannot achieve the total solution of their problems," these members called for international cooperation in a policy directed towards industrialization, introduction of a variety of production, and an increase in technical efficiency in production.

Dr. Ramiro Guerra of Cuba stressed the relationship of social problems in Latin America to the prices paid for their agricultural products and raw materials by the economically more highly developed countries, which can often fix prices unilaterally to the benefit of the buying nation. As an example of the direct effect on individual human beings of prices determined in international markets, he cited the wages of the workers in the Cuban sugar industry, which are determined on the basis of the price of sugar during the preceding 2 weeks, so that wages automatically rise and fall with the price of sugar. He also pointed out that, while the Cuban Government has planned a comprehensive national housing program, whether it can carry it out will depend on the quantity and price of exported products.

The Commission in its report defined economic policy as concerned with "the production of goods and services and their distribution to the best advantage of the community." It stressed the need for close coordination of economic with social policy—through the collective effort of the entire community—so as to secure a proper relationship between prices and incomes. This coordination is essential at the national level, the Commission pointed out, in order to improve the conditions of life for at least half the peoples of the world who now cannot achieve a decent standard of living. Only through such coordination can there be an equitable distribution of the national income

among all classes in the community.

Coordination of economic and social policy is also necessary at the international level to raise the level of living in countries with low standards because the wide differences in the living standards of different nations are a potent cause of "international discontent" and ultimately of war. In the words of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the opening session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, "without social justice and security there is no real foundation for peace, for it is among the socially disinherited and those who have nothing to lose that the gangster and aggressor recruit their supporters."

While it was in session, the Temporary Social Commission got into contact with the Economic and Employment Commission—another of the nuclear commissions established by the Economic and Social Council. It was agreed that economic and social policy must be coordinated and that the two Commissions must work together closely so as to harmonize their suggestions to the Council.

Participation of beneficiaries.—To be democratic, social policy must have the approval of those affected by the policy. The Commission recommended that labor and agricultural and similar unions, as most representative of the beneficiaries of social programs, should participate in the administration of these programs. France, for example, since its liberation, has changed its social insurance legislation to give the trade-union representatives more control. As adopted by the Economic and Social Council, this concept of the Commission took the following form: "The activities of the United Nations in the social field shall be based upon democratic principles; these activities shall be conducted in the interest of all peoples concerned, and with the active participation of the organizations which unite groups of people concerned with such activities (trade unions of workers, agricultural societies, et cetera)." The Commission considered that voluntary agencies must accept these democratic principles if they are to make a valuable contribution in carrying out modern social policy.

Review of Existing Organizations

Having agreed on a definition of the term "social" and on basic principles, the Commission reviewed the work of existing or proposed international organizations that cover some aspects of the social field or whose work is closely related to it—the ILO, Food and Agriculture Organization, UNESCO, UNRRA, and the World Health Organization. Early in the session these organizations, except for the World Health Organization, which had not yet been established,² had been invited to send representatives to confer with the Commission and to submit written information on their programs.

Consideration of the activities of these organizations led the Commission to three main conclusions that became the basis of its recommendations: successful activity of the United Nations in the social field will require the continuous cooperation of these agencies, but they should be left freedom of action to carry on their own work; "the role of the United Nations is to coordinate and stimulate the activities of the specialized agencies, to avoid overlapping and omissions and to secure the participation of these agencies" in carrying out the social policy established by the Economic and Social Council and by the General Assembly; and the United Nations should carry on social activities that do not fall within the scope of any of the existing agencies.

Recommendation for a Permanent Social Commission

To implement these conclusions, the Temporary Commission recommended that a permanent Social Commission be established under the Economic and Social Council.

Composition.—After considerable discussion of the relative merits of appointing nongovernmental experts in their personal capacities or official representatives of governments, it was agreed to recommend that the Commission be composed of 18 members, selected for their expert knowledge in the field and appointed for a 3-year term—13 to be representatives of and appointed by the governments selected for membership on the Commission by the Council and 5 nongovernmental members appointed in their

² See pages 16 and 28.

personal capacity by the Council on the nomination of the governments chosen. As is noted below, this form of composition was not adopted by the Economic and Social Council.

Representatives of specialized agencies are to be asked to attend sessions of the Commission, and reciprocal representation is to be arranged with other commissions in the social and economic fields.

Functions.—The functions of the Social Commission were outlined as follows:

1. To advise the Council on the development of general social policy and on the formulation of social principles to serve as a frame of reference for the work of specialized agencies and commissions in the social field.
2. To aid in coordinating activities in the social field, including the maintenance of a current record of all activities of any of the agencies and in advising the Council concerning liaison relationships, cross-representation, and other means of coordination.
3. To keep the Council informed concerning the progress made by governments in the practical application of social policies.
4. To consider and advise on measures that may need to be undertaken by international agencies or suggested to governments.

These recommendations were adopted with a reservation by one of the eight members, the representative of the United Kingdom, that the functions were too extensive.

Provision for Social Welfare Activities

In addition, the Temporary Commission recommended that the permanent Social Commission should provide for carrying on social welfare activities not covered by any of the existing organizations. The subjects found to be the special province of social welfare include: measures for helping individuals and families when necessary, to use available resources to meet their needs; administration of social assistance; care, protection, and service for groups with special needs; and social services in countries with special needs, such as industrially underdeveloped countries and those directly affected by the war.

These activities, according to the Commission's recommendations, would include not only collection and distribution of information, research and field studies, and advisory service but also practical help. For example, it was suggested that a model service be set up on the care of retarded and delinquent children—an urgent problem at this time because of the experience of youth in resistance movements during the war and their participation in many acts which are normally considered criminal. Other aspects of the Commission's activities would include calling conferences on special subjects, developing principles or standards, and drafting conventions, seeing that they are negotiated, and keeping informed on their implementation.

The Temporary Commission did not come to a conclusion on how these activities could best be organized. It recommended that the permanent Social Commission give early consideration to whether these activities should be carried on by the Social Commission itself or by a social welfare subcommittee under the Social Commission or by a subsidiary organ established by the General Assembly. Although the Commission believed that there might be some justification for creating a specialized social welfare agency, as has been done in other fields, it concluded that there would be advantages of staff service and financial support in bringing the social welfare agency within the framework of the Economic and Social Council.

Subcommission on children.—The Commission recommended that a subcommission on children be set up to work under whatever social welfare body is established. It pointed out that child welfare involves many aspects, some of which existing organizations already cover—such as education, which is the concern of UNESCO, child labor and youth employment, which come under the ILO, and child health, which will be covered by the World Health Organization. For this reason the Commission stressed the importance of a broad approach to child welfare by an agency that views the subject as a whole, in cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations concerned with particular phases of the problem. The Commis-

sion accordingly suggested that the subcommission be composed of a small number of outstanding child welfare experts, both governmental and non-governmental, and of representatives of other international organizations.

Continuation of the League of Nations work.—In accordance with its assignment, the Temporary Commission reviewed the work of the League of Nations in the social field. The League at first had limited this phase of its work to developing measures—through investigation and draft conventions—to aid in suppressing traffic in women and children. A little later it set up an advisory committee on child welfare, which maintained a Child Welfare Information Center and published a series of reports on various problems, such as the treatment of juvenile delinquency and illegitimacy. This work was later extended to include the adult offender, activities in this field being carried on in cooperation with the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission. All these activities were carried on under the Advisory Committee on Social Questions.

The Temporary Commission decided that these activities of the League should be carried on by the United Nations but with a bolder and more constructive approach. Accordingly, it was suggested that the permanent Commission should make the necessary arrangements for undertaking the various phases of this work. The Secretariat was asked to see that the system of annual reports from governments is maintained uninterruptedly.

Activities of the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission

The Temporary Social Commission considered it important that there should be an effective medium for studying the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders on a wide international basis. The International Penal and Penitentiary Commission, which has been in existence since 1872, has done valuable work on many aspects of these problems. The Temporary Commission, however, believed the United Nations should assume responsibility in this field. It therefore recommended that the permanent Social Commission be asked

to consult with the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission as a basis for recommending whether the latter should continue its work on the present lines in cooperation with an appropriate organ of the United Nations, or whether its functions should be taken over by an especially constituted body of the United Nations brought into direct relationship with the permanent Social Commission. It was thought that the second course would assure greater resources and the support of a larger number of countries.

Urgent problems requiring immediate attention.—The members from Greece and Yugoslavia kept before the Temporary Commission the acute social problems in countries that have suffered from war and occupation, especially the needs of homeless children, which are appallingly tragic in both countries. The Greek member, Mr. Argyropoulos, said in a memorandum: “. . . besides the great proportion of children and youths in teen age suffering from disease and undernourishment, there are thousands of them roving all around the country in complete destitution and without support” because “their parents or next of kin have been executed by the invader or have perished from starvation or disease.”

The needs of children in the war-affected countries were likewise stressed by the UNRRA representatives in their discussion of the importance of continuing some of UNRRA's welfare activities after their termination late in 1946. Among urgent problems that the permanent Social Commission should provide for are the care of orphaned children, including questions of legal guardianship; reeducation of children who have been living under extremely abnormal conditions; readjustment of displaced persons into a normal life; rehabilitation of the physically handicapped; the rebuilding of social welfare institutions; and the training of social workers and exchange of staff. The Temporary Commission asked that the permanent Commission, when established, give priority to plans for dealing with these problems.

The Commission also considered the problems of the industrially underdeveloped countries urgent, because of the low level of living among

the peoples of these countries. The members from Peru and Colombia suggested that subcommissions be established to study the possibility of setting up international bodies to deal with the problems of clothing, inadequate diets, housing, and raising the level of wages by increasing the economic capacity of countries through greater industrialization and better prices on the world market for their exports. The permanent Commission was also asked to give prompt attention to these problems.

Scope of activities.—An important aspect of the Commission's report was the recommendation that activities to deal with social problems should not be limited to information, research, and advisory services but should include practical help, such as sending trained personnel to countries in need of such service, developing model institutions, and helping financially when necessary. For example, the Commission suggested that, as one way of helping underdeveloped countries until they can achieve a greater degree of industrialization, financial assistance should be made available to provide needed social services, and recommended that the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development make provision for loans and financial assistance for social services as well as for economic reconstruction.

Recommendation for Staff

The Temporary Commission placed great importance on its recommendation that the permanent Commission and its subcommissions should be adequately staffed. It suggested that a division of the Secretariat be established under the Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs to provide staff service. The report called for sufficient staff, experienced in the various branches with which the permanent Commission will be concerned, for staff in the “social welfare field,” and for a section for work in the children's field. The report further recommended that a close contact be maintained between the Secretariat's Department of Economic Affairs and Department of Social Affairs.

Action of the Economic and Social Council

The Temporary Commission presented its report and a draft resolu-

tion incorporating its recommendations to the Economic and Social Council at its second session, which convened May 25. After general discussion the draft resolution was referred to a drafting committee. Following a proposal made by the representative of the United Kingdom that the scope of the Commission's work be limited to matters in the social field not covered by other commissions or by specialized agencies, the drafting committee developed a compromise wording on this point, and the resolution was reworded and shortened.

Terms of Reference of Social Commission

On June 21 the Council adopted the revised draft resolution, establishing a permanent Social Commission, with the following terms of reference:

(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.

Method of Appointment

The Council decided on the same method of appointment for all its commissions, including the Social Commission. Although there had been considerable support in the nuclear commissions for the Council's appointing individuals to the commissions in their personal capacities, the Council decided that all members of commissions should be designated by their governments. The Social Commission will therefore consist of an official representative from each of 18 nations selected by the Council. The Secretary General, however, is to consult with the selected governments

before the names of representatives are confirmed by the Council, in order to secure "a balanced representation in the various fields covered by the Commission."

Matters Referred for Further Consideration

The Council referred to the new Commission for early consideration and recommendation to the Council the following matters:

1. The suggestions of the Temporary Commission as to provision needed in the social welfare field.
2. Consideration of the best way of carrying on functions with reference to traffic in women and children, child welfare, the prevention of crime, and the treatment of offenders

on a broad international basis in close association with other social problems. The Social Commission was asked to take steps to create a subcommission, especially constituted for work in the child welfare field.

3. The observations of the Temporary Commission concerning social problems requiring immediate attention, especially problems in countries affected by the war or enemy occupation and in underdeveloped countries. It requested that the Social Commission give special attention "to the urgent need for finding some way of dealing with important aspects of the work of UNRRA" after its termination. The Social Commission was also asked to consider setting up international machinery in the fields of hous-

ing and of town and country planning.

The recommendations for an adequate staff for the Social Commission and its Committees were referred to the Secretary General.

Next Steps

Presumably the Council at its next session, which is scheduled to open in New York on September 11, will name the countries to be represented on the permanent Social Commission. The next steps can then be taken in setting up the Commission. As soon as it is established, the Social Commission will have to face complex and important problems, and its decisions will largely determine the effectiveness of international organization in the social field.

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priations authorized by the Social Security Act Amendments of 1946, approved August 10, bring the total amounts available for 1946-47 to \$11 million for maternal and child health, \$7.5 million for services for crippled children, and \$3.5 million for child welfare services.

Public Employment Offices Returned to States

Return of public employment offices to State control on November 15 was provided in the Labor-Federal Security Appropriation Act, 1947, which directed the Secretary of Labor to transfer to the appropriate agency in each State "the operation of State and local public employment office facilities and properties which were transferred by such State to the Federal Government in 1942 to promote the national war effort." Operation of special veterans' employment services under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 and of the employment office facilities and services in the District of Columbia remain with the U. S. Employment Service, which is also responsible under the Wagner-Peyser Act for ensuring adequate and uniform operating standards of State and local employment offices. The present legislation ensures protection of the rights of employees transferred from Federal to State employment.

The current act appropriates \$43 million for administration, operation, and maintenance of the USES and for

the special veterans' employment services. Of this amount, \$11 million is specified for "liquidation of unrecorded and contingent obligations, including the payment of accrued annual leave, arising in connection with the transfer of employment office facilities and services to State operation." The sum of \$42.8 million is appropriated for grants to States, beginning November 16, in accordance with the provisions of the Wagner-Peyser Act (June 6, 1933) and the pertinent provisions of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act. The necessity for State matching of Federal funds under the Wagner-Peyser Act is, however, waived until July 1, 1948.

UN's International Refugee and World Health Organizations

In addition to setting up a permanent Social Commission (see page 11) and establishing five other main commissions and four subcommissions to carry on its work in the economic and social fields, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations set up two other international organizations during its second session, held in New York from May 25 to June 21.

New International Refugee Organization.—To meet the urgent problem of providing care to the displaced persons and refugees of Europe and China when UNRRA's program is discontinued, the Council had established a Special Committee on Refu-

gees and Displaced Persons in February 1946. The committee convened in London during April and prepared suggestions for a draft constitution of a new International Refugee Organization. This report was reviewed and amended by the Economic and Social Council at its New York meeting.

In essence, the Council proposes for consideration by the member governments of the United Nations an international operating agency, temporary in character, to provide care through repatriation or resettlement to "genuine refugees and displaced persons" and to assure assistance to these people pending their repatriation or resettlement. Membership in the new international organization is open to all UN members, and also to other "peace loving States" upon recommendation of the Executive Committee by two-thirds majority vote of the General Council.

Since operating funds for the new organization are a major concern, the Council established a Committee on Finance, which met in London in July and prepared provisional administrative and operating budgets for the first financial year, with a proposed scale of contributions from the member nations.

Member governments of the United Nations are now reviewing both the draft constitution and the report of the Finance Committee. Their comments will be reviewed at the next

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