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Some reflections on the work and documents of the CCIR*

Last July, the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR) held its Plenary Assembly in Geneva for the third time, the other two occasions being the VIIth Plenary Assembly in 1951 and the Xth in 1963.

It so happens that each of the three Directors who have guided the destinies of this important permanent ITU organ since it was set up in 1927 has been in office each time one of these three Assemblies has been held.

In 1951 Professor van der Pol, the distinguished Dutch scientist, was Director of the CCIR.

In 1963, the Director was the late Dr. Metzler of Switzerland, who was to die five months later at the height of an active career.

At the XIIIth Plenary Assembly, these lofty functions were exercised by the third elected Director of the CCIR, Mr. Jack Herbstreit who, of his own free will, decided to stand down.

Each of the three Directors stands for an epoch and symbolizes a stage in the successful development of the CCIR's work. Mr. Herbstreit's name, in particular, will always be associated with space activities and the progress made in the field of telecommunication satellites.

While many changes have occurred from one epoch—that is to say, one Director—to the next, what has remained a basic

constant of the CCIR since its establishment is its importance as a technical body within which the representatives of administrations and of scientific and industrial organizations concerned with radiocommunications can work out recommendations whose world-wide authority has never been disputed. It is unnecessary, I am sure, to stress the importance of these recommendations in ensuring the harmonious progress of radiocommunications throughout the world and the standardization of the equipment offered on the world market.

In this connection, it is gratifying to note the alacrity with which the CCIR tackles the study of new techniques. It did this 15 years ago in the case of space techniques and, while to-day there is hardly any mention of lasers any more, the use of digital transmission techniques has already received the attention of several Study Groups.

To this should be added the benefit which administrative radio conferences can draw from the work of the CCIR.

In this connection, one of the tasks performed by the XIIIth Plenary Assembly was the technical preparation of the LF/MF Broadcasting Conference and the Conference to draw up a plan for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service in the 12 GHz band, which will meet at the beginning of 1977.

Here I think that it may be useful to recall the prerogatives of Plenary Assemblies as defined in the International Telecommunication Convention, Torremolinos 1973.

* These reflections were put forward by the Secretary-General of the ITU during the inaugural meeting of the XIIIth Plenary Assembly of the CCIR (Geneva, July 1974).

Under No. 419 of that Convention: "The Plenary Assemblies of the International Consultative Committees are authorized to submit to administrative conferences proposals arising directly from their recommendations or from findings on questions under their study".

On the basis of the recommendations adopted and the findings of current studies, the XIIIth Plenary Assembly decided on the proposals to be referred to the preparatory session of the Regional Administrative LF/MF Broadcasting Conference which is to meet in Geneva next month.

* * *

In another context, it should be borne in mind that the Plenipotentiary Conference at Torremolinos imparted a new impetus and orientation to the whole range of the Union's activities and it is no exaggeration to say that it marked a turning point in the development of the ITU.

That Conference, of course, confirmed once again the need to maintain the federative structure of our Union, while recognizing the importance of the work of the International Consultative Committees as technical bodies whose meetings are attended by the most highly qualified experts in the world. But at the same time it specified more clearly the prerogatives of the Secretary-General of the ITU and, in particular, his responsibilities in financial matters. In this connection he will be able to voice his opinions on the preparation and presentation of the documents for the meetings of the Consultative Committees.

In view of our present financial straits, it will be readily understood how anxious we are to exercise the maximum caution in using the funds allocated, since the same anxiety must be experienced by the senior officials of the various administrations. Indeed, the quest for new ways of saving money is now one of our day-to-day preoccupations. At the same time the CCIR must continue to be able to meet all its responsibilities and suffer no hindrance in the performance of its duties. By acting wisely, we shall be able to find that position of balance which will enable the CCIR to do all that it has to do while at the same time making certain savings.

On this point, I think it would be useful to give a few figures. The total documentation of the final meetings of the CCIR Study Groups amounted to some 3000 pages in each of the three working languages, or a total of 9000 pages. The preparatory documentation for this Plenary Assembly consists of 4415 pages in each of the three working languages, or more than 13 000 pages in all, representing about 16 tons of paper.

I should not wish to weigh on the same scales the expenditure of the Secretariat, however high it might be, and the results obtained by the CCIR—all the more since those results are fruits of the work carried out by the administrations themselves. On a number of occasions, however, I have had the impression that certain very long texts appeared again and again without any significant changes, thus passing through a series of stages each of which involved substantial costs.

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Quite apart from the protracted nature of this process, is it really necessary to invest so much effort and money on repeated reprintings of texts which have been so little amended?

In addition, I would venture to add that some of the reports submitted, while of unquestionable scientific interest, seemed at times to go rather beyond the sphere of competence of the CCIR which, under the Convention, has to study technical and operating questions and to issue recommendations on them.

One further remark—again prompted by the quest for possible economies without impairing the effectiveness of the CCIR: is it really necessary—is it even useful—to have summary records of meetings other than those of the Plenary Assembly?

All these questions must be asked and must be given realistic replies in the light of all the considerations advanced, since the Administrative Council of the ITU has the difficult task of fixing the budgets for meetings not only within the limits laid down by the Plenipotentiary Conference, but also with a view to making the maximum possible savings.

In this connection it is only fair to mention the case of certain international Working Parties consisting of a small number of experts, which succeed, at small secretarial cost, in arriving at conclusions which are virtually definitive, thus simplifying the task of the Study Groups by reducing to a minimum the amount of preparatory documentation submitted to them.

Another problem related to documentation is that of the publication of the conclusions of Plenary Assemblies. Since interim meetings are held and since publication inevitably takes time, the printed conclusions are valid really for only half the time between two Plenary Assemblies.

Thus the conclusions of the XIIIth Plenary Assembly, which will doubtless be published towards the end of the first half of 1975, will include a number of texts prepared at or before meetings held in the summer of 1972, which will be therefore at least three years old.

Must we really wait so long to endorse texts already worked out and approved by Study Groups composed of the world's most eminent experts in the particular field with which each deals?

All these questions were well worth raising and gave delegates the opportunity to review the situation and draw the appropriate conclusions, since technology is developing apace and the organizational methods established twenty years ago are also bound to evolve.

Indeed, the Organization Committee of the XIIIth Plenary Assembly discussed these various problems at length, taking into account the need both to keep the expenditure involved to the strict minimum and to lighten so far as possible the heavy burden which results, for the participants in the work of the CCIR, from the steady increase in the volume of documentation.

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