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Mr. Loeber would be most interested in receiving comments on his article from readers. Such comments may be addressed to him care of the Editor of the Journal.



## ADMINISTRATIVE RADIO CONFERENCES - IS IT TIME FOR A CHANGE?

by CARL W. LOEBER

"THIS IS INTOLERABLE!" exclaimed a well-known delegate to the 1959 Radio Conference as he stood before the bulletin board in the *Bâtiment Electoral*, in Geneva and tried to decide which one of some 25 conference meetings scheduled for the morning he should attend. Another conferee observed that "This must be the last of the general conferences." A third agreed, adding "There must be a better way to revise our regulations."

Comments such as the above were heard throughout the conference. They were based on concern over the length of the conference, the number of experts administrations were required to send, the complexity of the subjects considered, the inability to treat numerous important subjects adequately or even in a cursory manner, the difficulty of small delegations to have a voice in the proceedings of the many groups which met simultaneously, and the pressure under which the conference was required to work for nearly five months. Readers who attended the conference are well aware of these difficulties.

A glance at a few conference statistics reveals the reasons why there was so much conversation regarding this topic in the foyer and around the coffee bar of the *Bâtiment Electoral*.

Excluding the conference secretariat, 798 persons were listed as participating. 697 of these were members of national delegations from 86 countries. 57 delegations were composed of fewer than six members, while there was a total of 104 committees, subcommittees, and working groups. Simultaneous meetings of many of these groups gave rise to serious problems of administration, representation, and meeting space.

In retrospect, the size and complexity of the conference, not to mention its tempo from start to ending, were such as to make one wonder that any coherence and completeness were achieved in the document which was evolved. By comparison with the 1632 regulatory paragraphs and 26 annexes adopted in 1959, the 207 paragraphs and eight annexes approved by the Washington Conference of 1927 were indeed a light task.

Yet, despite the dynamic nature of the radio art and the imperative need for detailed regulations governing the whole sphere of radio-electronics from maritime radio communications to radar and the new earth-space service,

we have made little progress in modernizing our procedures for obtaining such regulations.

We still gather more or less regularly to rewrite the entire volume of international radio regulations at a single conference. We must admit that some of our rewriting can hardly be considered an improvement! Furthermore, we still publish the regulations in a format that suggests that all other radio services are merely an adaptation of the maritime mobile service, as was the case fifty years ago. Our regulations therefore are subject to misunderstanding by the uninitiated.

For example, regulations governing the aeronautical mobile service are not to be found in a single chapter clearly labeled as such. Rather, bits and pieces of these regulations are to be found in eleven separate articles scattered throughout the volume.

No wonder then that the 1959 conferees had difficulty in organizing and coordinating their efforts and in drafting a final document. The delegates who believed the 1959 conference should be the last of its kind were realists.

### The Alternatives

In the view of those who have given serious thought to the future of ITU radio conferences, a cross road has been reached. The path straight ahead leads to increasingly complex and lengthy conferences. The other path leads to specialized conferences called as necessary to revise specific portions of the regulations and which will require attendance only by those directly concerned with the regulations to be considered.

Clearly, the time has arrived to change our course by choosing the latter alternative, i.e., recognition of the growing need for shorter, specialized conferences. This course has been followed in part since 1947. In the interval between the Atlantic City Conference of that year and the 1959 Geneva Conference five conferences were held to deal with special subjects which could be given more adequate consideration when removed from the hectic atmosphere of "ordinary" conferences. The 1959 Conference provided for three specialized conferences to deal with:

- a) Frequency Allocation for Space Communication
- b) Revision of the Aeronautical Frequency Allotment Plan



- c) Congestion in the High Frequency Spectrum, if such a Conference is recommended by the Panel of Experts.

## **Codification of the Regulations**

A prerequisite to any reorganization of radio conferences is the codification of present regulations so as to place all regulations relating to a particular subject in a single article, chapter, or part. In general, the present regulations may be divided into three categories: those of a general technical or administrative nature affecting two or more radio services, those concerning individual radio services, and those concerned with rates and accounting procedures for public messages and radio-telephone calls.

Such a categorization point to the following classification of subjects:

### **I General Regulations**

1. General Technical Regulations
2. General Administrative Regulations
3. Frequency Assignment and Allocation
4. Frequency Notification and Registration
5. Interference and Monitoring
6. Emergency and Safety Communications

### **II Service Regulations**

1. Aeronautical Mobile Service
2. Maritime Mobile Service
3. Amateur Service
4. Experimental Service
5. Radio Determination Service
6. Broadcasting Service
7. Fixed Service
8. Special Services

### **III Regulations Governing Radio Telegrams and Radio-telephone Calls**

It will be noted that almost any one of the above subjects could be treated at a special conference. It will also be noted that no conference time need be devoted to consideration of those regulations not clearly in need of revision. Thus the possibility exists of calling short conferences devoted exclusively to a single subject and requiring the attendance of only those experts directly concerned with that subject.

## **A Specific Suggestion**

Based on lengthy study as well as extensive participation in past conferences, changes in future radio conferences are suggested below for serious study by all administrations. It is noteworthy that, except for changes in the names of the present three types of radio conferences, these suggestions could be put into effect immediately without contravening the Convention of 1959.

It is suggested that General Administrative Conferences replace the present Ordinary Administrative Conferences, Limited Administrative Conferences replace the present Extraordinary Administrative Conferences, and Regional Conferences replace the present Special Regional Conferences.

1. *General Conferences* would have many of the functions now assigned to Ordinary Conferences, including election of members of the IFRB but excluding the general revision of the radio regulations. These conferences would however, be authorized to revise those of the General Regulations referred to above which were deemed to require attention. Ordinarily, the agendas of General Conferences would be subject to the prior agreement of a majority of the administrations of member countries so as to clearly define the tasks to be undertaken. An additional task for General Conferences would be the resolution of any difficulties or inconsistencies arising from the decisions taken by Limited or Regional Conferences.

2. *Limited Conferences* could be called at any time to consider any one or several of the categories of General or Service Regulations. Their agendas would, of course, be subject in all cases to prior agreement by a majority of the administrations of member countries. The decisions taken at such conferences would be final, except when those decisions may be in conflict with other regulations then in effect. In such cases, the conflict would be referred to the next General Conference as indicated above. It goes without saying that conferences concerned only with particular radio services would not adopt changes affecting the General Regulations or Regulations of radio services. Limited Conferences could, however, adopt any recommendations deemed necessary or desirable regarding amendment of other regulations.

3. *Regional Conferences* would be called to deal with regional problems in precisely the manner followed in the past. These conferences would not be authorized to revise any regulations adopted by Limited or General Conferences, but would be called for the specific purpose of solving problems unique to a region or area.

Pending revision of the 1959 Convention, the foregoing suggestions could be adopted through the simple expedient of calling no more "ordinary" radio conferences and by regarding future conferences other than regional conferences, as "extraordinary" within the meaning of the 1959 Convention. The agendas for such conferences would be clearly confined to specific tasks and would have prior approval of administrations.

Obviously many detailed considerations are necessary in connection with the above concept for future radio conferences, and only the broad outlines can be given in this paper. However, the subject is one which warrants most serious consideration by all administrations if the international regulations are to keep space with the rapidly developing complexity of the radio-electronic art.