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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

PROPOSALS ON THE NEED FOR AN
ECONOMIC REPORT AND SURVEY

Note by the Secretariat on Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda

A major and immediate obstacle which the Economic Commission for Latin America will encounter in its activities under the mandate set forth in its terms of reference (document E/712/Rev.1), particularly in respect of the "urgent economic problems arising out of the war", will be the serious inadequacy of comprehensive, comparable and reliable economic data for much of the area covered in the Commission's geographical scope. It is true that for certain countries the volume of information available is sufficient to sustain a thorough economic analysis. In the main, however, the general level of economic information currently published or readily available will, it is feared, prove to be out of date, lacking comparability, or insufficient to provide a satisfactory basis for recommendations to be made by the Economic Commission.

Basically, many of the causes underlying this lack of data stem from the generally under-developed nature of the economies of many of the Latin-American countries. Awareness of this situation was evidenced by the concern expressed by the Latin-American members of the Economic and Social Council who served on the ad hoc Committee on the Establishment of an Economic Commission for Latin America. Their views on this matter were later endorsed by that Committee as a whole. The Committee reported that it had found itself handicapped by an over-all "lack of reliable or comprehensive statistics and economic data" and its report left little doubt that all efforts to deal with the serious economic maladjustments in Latin America would be impeded by the same obstacles.

The filling of all or a great part of these gaps would involve labours of a long-term nature far beyond the present resources of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America. In considering any such plan, moreover, it must be borne in mind that in

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giving the Commission its mandate, the Economic and Social Council stressed the shorter term "urgent economic problems arising out of the war and ... from world economic maladjustment".

In order to start working towards the carrying out of the Commission's mandate, some of the most serious of these gaps have to be filled. While the Secretariat will energetically initiate inquiries and the collection and analysis of material related to these short-term problems, it is unlikely that given the magnitude of the problem it can, on its own, make more than a start. Such efforts cannot be expected to go more than a short way towards aiding in the solution of the urgent problems currently facing the Latin-American countries.

The Secretariat, therefore, wishes to make two suggestions. First, it suggests that the Member Governments may wish to present, during the Commission's first session, as detailed statements as they desire regarding their current economic situation. Such statements might have particular reference to those "economic problems arising out of the war and ... from world economic maladjustment" referred to in the Commission's terms of reference. Thus, the Commission could commence its work with summary statements before it as to the magnitude and gravity of the problems with which its members have to deal currently.

As a second suggestion, the Secretariat tentatively proposes to members of the Economic Commission whose territories are within the geographical scope of the Commission that these Governments should undertake the preparation, on a common basis, of an economic survey covering the events of the post-war years and indicating briefly the consequences of war-time developments upon their national economy.

This second proposal would serve several purposes. It would supplement the data presented by members during the Commission's session and so provide a sound factual basis for further work. It would make widely available an authoritative statement of the economic problems of the region; a statement which would become available, when approved, to other economic organs of the United Nations and so focus attention on common problems and the possibility of co-operative action in seeking solutions. Finally, it would provide an opportunity to place the economic problems of Latin America against a background of world economic events. Such a presentation is not only one of the Commission's duties; it could also be one of the most effective ways of drawing attention to the highly important economic relationships of Latin America with the rest of the world on which economic stability and progress of the region depend.

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An outline for such an economic survey could be prepared by the Secretariat. The outline might include a discussion of the extractive industries, manufacturing industries, power production, construction and the building trades, transport and communications, international trade and foreign exchange. Amongst the subjects about which information would be sought, an important place would necessarily be given to the food and agricultural situation with due emphasis on obstacles hindering production or its expansion.

The preparation by each of the Member Governments of an economic survey on these lines would certainly facilitate the work of the Commission, enabling it at its second session to make suggestions and formulate recommendations regarding the possibility of speedy and remedial action necessary for dealing with these urgent economic problems.

Should the Commission decide in favour of such a procedure, it is recommended that the reports (based on an outline to be prepared by the Secretariat) should be made available to the Secretariat during October. The Secretariat would then undertake to arrange and edit them for publication, would prepare a general survey dealing with those problems which affect the majority of the Governments included within the Commission's scope, and endeavour to elucidate those general economic relationships with which the Commission will wish to concern itself.

In undertaking this task the Secretariat would work as closely as possible with the interested specialized agencies in order that their points of view should find proper presentation.

It is believed that the use of a common framework for the national reports and their preparation under the authority of Governments will ensure the production of an authoritative, up-to-date and comprehensive survey of economic conditions throughout all Latin-American countries. Should Member Governments decide to take the necessary measures to ensure the preparation of a report on their economic problems, the Secretariat will stand ready to co-operate with Governments as fully as possible.
