

F.A.O.—THE HISTORY.

By J. B. MAYNE, B.Ec.

(This is the second of three articles dealing with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.)

In the article entitled "F.A.O.—Background" published in the October issue of this "Review" the basic factors responsible for the existing world shortage of food were examined. It was pointed out that a considerable amount of reorganisation would be necessary before even the minimum requirements were secured in some areas. A long series of problems in production and distribution remain to be solved before minimum reasonable standards of intake of food are attained. The responsibility for organising national and international activities to find solutions for these problems has fallen on F.A.O. In a later article the nature of the task confronting F.A.O. will be more closely examined. In the present instance, it is proposed to deal very briefly with the history of the organisation, showing how by both structure and aims it is designed to face up to the world's food problems.

Historical Background.

The international approach to food and agriculture has a long history. In the first years of the 20th century David Lubin persuaded the King of Italy to convoke the nations to establish the International Institute of Agriculture, which worked in a limited field. In the late 1920's agriculture was depressed, while industry continued to boom; in the 1930's, with the onset of the depression, large unsaleable surpluses of many foods caused public attention to be fixed on the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty. At the same time, great advances were being made in the study of nutrition and the place of food in the prevention and the elimination of many diseases. In 1925 the League of Nations, the International Institute of Agriculture and the International Labour Organisation decided to undertake research on the subject of nutrition in relation to social, agricultural and economic problems. The League, through its Health Organisation, set up a technical Commission, consisting of world-famous scientists, physiologists and bio-chemists, to assess human requirements for food. The Commission decided that it should consider and report on optimum food requirements, and that report was the first international assessment of food needs, and the first to be expressed on an optimum basis. The League, through its Economic Organisation, set up a Mixed Committee to examine the economic aspects of malnutrition. The Committee recommended that Governments should establish national Nutrition Committees and, during 1937 and 1938, some twenty-five Governments did so. During the recent war, for the first time in a whole series of countries, the production and consumption of national food supplies were planned in terms of human needs. Nutritional requirements were estimated in terms of the essentials to health and the food available within each country was rationed in accordance with the

health scales decided upon. In fact, the recommendations of the League's Mixed Committee were put into effect during war-time, and this integration of nutritional and agricultural policy has been the basis of the post-war approach.

Hot Springs.

In May, 1943, the representatives of forty-four countries were invited, on the initiative of the late President Roosevelt, to the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture at Hot Springs, Virginia, U.S.A. The Hot Springs Conference underlined the fact that at least two-thirds of the world's population are undernourished and many face periodic starvation; world production and distribution would need to be reorganised so that the levels of consumption of those without adequate food might be progressively raised. The Conference emphasised the fundamental interdependence of consumers and producers. The discussion showed that the types of foods most generally required to improve people's diets and health are mainly those which maintain the productivity of the soil and mean greater economic security for the producers. National representatives drew attention to the state of health in their respective countries and it was clear that a state of malnutrition existed in some sections of every country, and that in many countries the majority of the people were grossly ill-nourished. Recognising the obligation of nations to raise living standards and to improve agricultural efficiency, the Conference proposed that an international organisation, to be known as F.A.O., should be set up to deal with all the problems of food and agriculture. Conference recommended that Governments should report both to their own peoples and also to other nations, through F.A.O., about the state of nutrition and the progress of agriculture in their own countries. These reports would indicate the progress being made in raising living standards, and would bring the record of every reporting country to the notice of other nations.

The Interim Commission on Food and Agriculture.

On the recommendation of the Hot Springs Conference, the United Nations Interim Commission on Food and Agriculture was set up in July, 1943, to make plans for a permanent organisation to deal not only with food and agriculture but with forestry and fisheries as well. Each of the United Nations appointed a representative on the Interim Commission. The Commission was assisted by a small international secretariat and by technical committees on science, economics, nutrition and food management, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and statistics. The work was financed by contributions from Member Governments. The Commission prepared a Constitution for F.A.O., and when it was submitted to Governments, more than twenty indicated their acceptance, thus enabling F.A.O. to come formally into existence. As well as several technical reports, it also prepared a report on the suggested structure and functions of the organisation to serve as a working basis for the first Conference.

The Quebec Conference.

F.A.O. officially came into being with the signing of its Constitution on 16th October, 1945. This ceremony took place at the opening meeting of the First Session of the Conference, which was held in the City of Quebec, Canada, from 16th October to 1st November, 1945. At the initial signing, the following forty-two nations became members:—

Australia.	Greece.	Paraguay.
Belgium.	Guatemala.	Peru.
Bolivia.	Haiti.	Philippine Commonwealth.
Brazil.	Honduras.	Poland.
Canada.	Iceland.	Syria.
Chile.	India.	Union of South Africa.
China.	Iraq.	United Kingdom.
Columbia.	Lebanon.	United States of America.
Cuba.	Liberia.	Uruguay.
Czechoslovakia.	Luxembourg.	Venezuela.
Denmark.	Mexico.	Yugoslavia.
Dominican Republic.	Netherlands.	
Ecuador.	New Zealand.	
Egypt.	Nicaragua.	
France.	Norway.	
	Panama.	

The policy making body of F.A.O. is the Conference, composed of one representative from each Member nation. Each nation has one vote in the Conference which meets at least once each year. An Executive Committee of nine to fifteen members acts for the Conference between sessions.

Though the First Session of the Conference took place in a period of transition from war to peace, it accomplished several things; firstly, it constructed the framework for operating F.A.O.; secondly, it worked out rules of procedure and financial regulations, set up a budget for the first and second financial years and laid down the bases for the first year's activity. An important organisational resolution approved by the Conference was one urging the closest relationship with the United Nations Organisation and its agencies. Other recommendations and resolutions dealt with the winding up of the affairs of the International Institute of Agriculture, its Annex, the Centre International de Sylviculture, and the Comité International du Bois, transferring their libraries, archives and properties to F.A.O.; and adopting after the First Session, the same language procedures as the United Nations Organisation.

The Conference also appointed F.A.O.'s first Director-General, Sir John Boyd Orr, eminent Scottish scientist in nutrition and agriculture, as well as an Executive Committee. To plan the broad outline of action for F.A.O., the Conference divided into six committees covering nutrition and food management, agriculture, forestry and forest products, fisheries, marketing and statistics.

From all this, two important principles emerged, namely, that there should be expansion of both production and consumption, and that the close interdependence of agriculture and industry should be recognised.

In accepting the F.A.O. Constitution, Member Governments agreed to report periodically on the progress made towards achieving the purposes of the organisation. These reports were expected to become the basis of joint action. In return, F.A.O. aimed to make available valuable advice to Member countries, and would conduct its own research programme.

F.A.O. will operate on a budget of five million dollars a year for the first five years, but initial working costs were below this figure. Member nations contribute on a scale of allocations based on various factors, but no one nation is called upon to contribute more than one-quarter of total expenses.

Functions of F.A.O.

According to Article I of the F.A.O. Constitution:—

“1. The Organisation shall collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture.

“2. The Organisation shall promote and, where appropriate, shall recommend national and international action with respect to—

- (a) scientific, technological, social and economic research relating to nutrition, food and agriculture;
- (b) the improvement of education and administration relating to nutrition, food and agriculture, and the spread of public knowledge of nutritional and agricultural science and practice;
- (c) the conservation of natural resources and the adoption of improved methods of agricultural production;
- (d) the improvement of the processing, marketing and distribution of food and agricultural products;
- (e) the adoption of policies for the provision of adequate agricultural credit, national and international;
- (f) the adoption of international policies with respect to agricultural commodity arrangements.

“3. It shall also be the function of the Organisation—

- (a) to furnish such technical assistance as governments may request;
- (b) to organise, in co-operation with the governments concerned, such missions as may be needed to assist them to fulfil the obligations arising from their acceptance of the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture; and
- (c) generally to take all necessary and appropriate action to implement the purposes of the Organisation as set forth in the preamble.”

Special Meeting on Urgent Food Problems.

Immediately following the close of the First Session, the Executive Committee met to plan the initial work of F.A.O. The first project was the drawing up of a statistical picture of world food production and supplies, trade, consumption and the needs of deficit areas. So on 20th May, 1946, a special meeting was called to consider urgent food problems as an outcome of the international food situation which had been worsened by drought and the failure of the monsoon in India. The Special Meeting then turned to long-term problems and asked the Director-General of F.A.O. to study existing international machinery and recommend to the next F.A.O. Conference any expanded functions or new machinery that might be necessary to prevent both surpluses and shortages in future years. This was done.

Some weeks before the Second Conference, F.A.O. issued a report entitled "Proposals for a World Food Board." The report called for creation of a World Food Board that would stabilise the prices of agricultural commodities on world markets, establish a world food reserve sufficient for any emergency, provide funds for financing the disposal of surplus agricultural products, and co-operate with organisations concerned with international credits. At the same time, F.A.O. published another report, "World Food Survey," which estimated available food supplies for the pre-war years in seventy countries, and matched them against nutrition targets for various countries or areas. The conclusion was that even before the war disrupted and depleted food supplies, about half the world's population was seriously undernourished, about one-sixth were eating at a marginal level, and somewhat less than a third were enjoying high-calorie diets.

Another meeting took place between experts from a number of countries, commencing on 10th May, 1946, to advise the Director-General on the various aspects of organising F.A.O.'s long-term Statistical, Library and Scientific Information Services.

The Copenhagen Conference.

The next F.A.O. development was the holding of the Second Session of the Conference at Copenhagen, Denmark, from 2nd to 13th September, 1946. This was the first regular conference session since F.A.O. was created at Quebec and was important for its appraisal of the Organisation's work of its early months, and for its guidance to future policy. In particular, the Conference faced up to the central problem of long-range food policy—the existence of unmarketable surpluses alongside mass malnutrition and even starvation.

Five new member countries were admitted during the Conference session—Eire, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland and Hungary, bringing total membership to 47. The Conference approved the preliminary report of the F.A.O. Mission for Greece—the first such enterprise of the Organisation, in which a group of experts made a study of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries of Greece and recommended the outlines of a long-range programme. The Conference also considered the reports of the six Standing

Committees mentioned above. Important actions concerning F.A.O. organisation included approval of a draft working agreement with the United Nations Organisation, and the creation of a Finance Sub-Committee to the Executive.

Thirty-three member nations were represented by voting delegates, eight by observers. Seven non-member countries and fourteen organisations also sent observers. The Conference divided its work among commissions, which in turn established committees. Three commissions were established—one for technical questions, one for organisation and administration, and one for world food policy.

In making his report to the Second Conference, the Director-General reviewed the work of F.A.O. and commended to members of the organisation the "World Food Survey" for their examination. He stressed the extreme importance of national F.A.O. Committees in expediting the plans of the organisation as a whole.

The Preparatory Commission.

The principal fruit of this Conference was the creation of a Preparatory Commission charged with recommending an inter-governmental programme for preventing both shortages and surpluses of food and other agricultural products. In particular, the Commission was instructed to examine critically the Director-General's "Proposals for a World Food Board." It was decided that the Commission should comprise sixteen F.A.O. member nations, while three non-member nations, with major food resources, would be asked to participate.

Thus the basic problem of widespread insecurity was recognised, the approach through positive international action was agreed upon, and the necessary machinery was set in motion. At the conclusion of the Conference, Sir John Boyd Orr said, "To-day, through their common servant, F.A.O., the nations can send a message of hope to the world and the assurance that they will not rest until victory is won against hunger and poverty . . . the centre of interest now passes from this Conference to the Preparatory Commission . . . I hope it will realise the need for quick action. Things are not going well in international affairs . . . we are racing against time."

The Preparatory Commission on World Food Proposals began its deliberations on 28th October, 1946, at Washington, under the chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. S. M. (now Viscount) Bruce, a former Australian Prime Minister. The Commission's Report, issued on 24th January, 1947, contained recommendations for far-reaching national and international action to expand consumption and stabilise prices of food and other agricultural products. It pointed out that raising the world's diet level to a health standard would require large increases in production and consumption. Recommendations for reaching this goal included the expansion of industry in the less developed countries so as to increase purchasing power, as well as national and international efforts to finance these developments.

The Commission found that the majority of countries could raise their dietary standards by developing their own agriculture, particularly with modern scientific techniques. However, although production could be greatly stimulated by the use of improved methods in the less advanced countries, it would necessitate a greatly reduced labour force; so that very little might be contributed towards raising the dietary standards of the people. Consequently, the Commission agreed that agricultural development must be paralleled by an expansion of industry if the adoption of modern methods was not to result in loss of employment for those existing with primitive agriculture.

From the beginning it had been evident that the Commission would not recommend a World Food Board. Such a board would require the broadest kind of support to be effective, and a number of nations were not prepared to join in the creation of an international agency with funds and authority. However, there was unanimous agreement on the Copenhagen objectives and the need for intergovernmental consultation and joint action in reaching them; and wide interest was shown in the techniques such as famine reserves, buffer stocks and use of unmarketable surpluses to improve nutrition, included in Sir John Boyd Orr's proposals. As its positive finding the Commission recommended the creation of a World Food Council of eighteen member nations; to keep world food supplies under constant review, and to advise governments on co-ordination of agricultural and nutritional programmes and commodity operations. The Food Council would also advise F.A.O. on emergency measures which could not wait on the full F.A.O. Conference.

The Preparatory Commission's report was considered by the F.A.O. Executive Committee at its meeting in Rome on 3rd March, 1947. It approved the Commission's analysis of long-term food problems and endorsed its recommendation that intergovernmental consultation on plans should form an integral part of the regular sessions of the F.A.O. Conference. The Executive felt, however, that this work of reviewing national nutritional and agricultural programmes and of suggesting general policies in those fields could best be done by the entire Conference of F.A.O., instead of by an 18-nation World Food Council, as proposed by the Preparatory Commission. It suggested that such a Council would be of most service if it served as a commodity commission of the Conference and met at intervals between sessions. Indeed, machinery of this kind, the Committee felt, would not require any amendments to the F.A.O. Constitution.

The Executive Committee's views, as well as those of the Preparatory Commission were to be reviewed at the Third F.A.O. Conference to be held at Geneva, commencing 25th August, 1947.

General Activities.

At present F.A.O. is working on two important undertakings. The first is the sounding out of national opinions on the proposed 1950 World Census of Agriculture, which will collect data on acreage and production of commodities of world-wide importance, and on tenure and major land classification. The second is the

sponsoring of a series of conferences, many of which have already been held, on technical and semi-technical subjects, *e.g.*, statistics, health, forestry and husbandry. Two extremely important Conferences have been held this year. An International Timber Conference was held at Marianske Lazne, Czechoslovakia, from 28th April to 10th May, 1947. Conference examined world shortages of timber supplies and discussed cutting schedules. From 16th May to 16th June, 1947, F.A.O. convened a Rice Study Group at Trivandrum, Travancore, India. The Group estimated that, without a succession of abnormally good crops in all countries, there would be a grave shortage of rice for another five years. It was therefore agreed that the international allocation of export supplies would have to continue for some time and that efforts to increase production must be made.

Geneva.

The Third Conference of F.A.O. was held at Geneva from the 25th of August to early September, 1947. Although no close details of this Conference have yet been made available, it is known that present shortages of food were considered to be extremely serious. The Australian delegate, Mr. F. W. Bulcock, pointed out that the world's agricultural production in the next five to ten years would need to be doubled to provide satisfactory dietary levels. The Director-General of F.A.O., Sir John Boyd Orr, told delegates: "Never in our lifetime will supplies catch up with the needs of the people of the world. Two dangers face us—famine in the immediate future, and prospects of unsalable gluts as in 1929. The second danger will arise in countries too poor to buy food." Forty-nine countries were represented at the Conference, Costa Rica and El Salvador having become members before the Conference began. Austria, Finland and Siam were nominated for membership. The progress of F.A.O.'s Second Mission, this time to Poland, was reviewed.

The most important outcome of the Third Conference was the formation of a World Food Council as recommended by the Preparatory Commission.

World Food Council.

The Council is to consist of eighteen consumer and producer nations nominated on the basis of geographical regions. Australia, Canada and South Africa are included. Lord Bruce of Melbourne was unanimously elected Chairman of the World Food Council. In a statement made shortly after his election Lord Bruce stressed the urgency of international action to arrive at solutions to the world's present pressing need for food.

The first meeting of the World Food Council was held in New York on Monday, 3rd November, 1947. The Director-General of F.A.O., Sir John Boyd Orr, pointed out that a gap between the demand and supply of grain is ten million tons and that there could be little hope that the present world shortage would end with the 1948 harvest. "Stocks are so low that even with a bumper harvest many countries may be forced to continue bread rationing

during 1949," he added. The Director-General said that the World's Food Council's primary task was to rebuild the world's economic and financial system on a more stable basis than before the War.

Australia and F.A.O.

Australia's own position in F.A.O. deserves mention. Australia was one of the foundation members of the organisation and members of her three successive delegations have taken prominent part in the work of the organisation. In addition, Australia has already begun the task of supplying statistical material to F.A.O. Headquarters in Washington, as well as comments and advice on other matters where required. Within Australia, too, Federal and State authorities have begun intergovernmental discussion on F.A.O. and its problems in relation to Australia. A Commonwealth F.A.O. Committee has been functioning for some time, and it is expected that Committees will be formed in all States in the near future. The formation of a State Committee in New South Wales has recently been announced.

Conclusion.

F.A.O. is the largest organisation of its kind to approach world agricultural and food problems. It has come into existence after the ravages of war have made the most serious inroads into world food production. It is one problem to put production where it was in 1939. But this is not enough. Even in pre-war years many countries could not lift national food consumption of their peoples beyond a bare subsistence level and, therefore, suffered all the results of chronic malnutrition. The other main problem is to ensure adequate effective distribution even when production targets are attained. This is the task of F.A.O. which will be discussed in a later article. Because of its international composition it can be hoped that F.A.O. will make great progress towards its objectives. It is necessary to remember, nevertheless, that its existence is linked with that of the parent body—U.N.O. Both depend on the spirit of co-operation being applied to everyday practical details, if they are to continue to exist and to succeed.
