Report of the Review Board on certain Questions concerning the Structure of the Secretariat

The Review Board set up by the Executive Secretary, following discussion by the CONTRACTING PARTIES (SR.12/20) during the twelfth session, has submitted the following report:

I. During the year 1959 the Board met a number of times to consider (d) and (e) of its terms of reference, reading as follows:

(d) to examine the structure of the secretariat and express their views concerning the desirability of providing within that structure a number of posts for which only fixed-term appointments should be given; and

(e) to indicate, if necessary, the most appropriate criteria for the application of that policy, either at the present time or in the future.

At the request of the Executive Secretary, Mr. J. Cappelen, Norwegian Permanent Delegate to the International Organizations, agreed to take the place of Mr. G. Clark who had meanwhile left Geneva, while Mr. A. Lethbridge (United Nations) agreed to replace Mr. H. Ph. Sobels. The Third Report was finalized in January 1960.

II. At the invitation of the Board the Executive Secretary explained the origin and meaning of the terms of reference, and described the functioning of the secretariat and the nature of its varying responsibilities. The Board also examined arguments which have been put forward elsewhere - e.g. in paragraphs 53-55 of the Report of the United Nations Salary Review Committee A/3209 both for and against a policy of utilizing fixed-term contracts.

III. It is clear that the principal arguments adduced in favour of the policy are:

(a) that it can help to correct "unbalanced" geographical distribution of staff;

(b) that a constant influx of new ideas and experience is essential if complacency and bureaucracy are to be avoided;

(c) that there is an advantage in having a group of people working in national government services who have served in international secretariats;

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(d) that it can make available to international secretariats the services of highly qualified and experienced men and women often specialized in the field of competence of the organization concerned who would only be willing or able to join international organizations for relatively short periods.

IV. If these arguments are applied to the present circumstances of GATT, it is clear, in the opinion of the Board, that in view of GATT's limited professional staff, the problem in practice is somewhat different in GATT from what it is in larger organizations. Thus as regards geographical distribution GATT has been comparatively successful in filling its small professional cadre with staff of many different nationalities. Fixed-term contracts could not lead to great improvement. The Board would assume that in case the professional staff were to be increased as a result of a growing volume of work, geographical representation would be further improved whenever possible and as far as compatible with the technical needs of the organization.

V. As regards the influx of new ideas there is no doubt that permanent officials in an international secretariat are liable to become stale. The risk is perhaps less in GATT than in some other organizations because of the almost continuous contact between staff and national representatives and delegations; even so the risk exists, and it is incumbent on the organization to devise preventative measures. On the other hand, the Board believes that the need for new blood must be weighed against the disruption of work caused by staff changes. In a large organization this disruption may be negligible, but the smaller the organization the more serious it may become. Whilst the Board believes that given the circumstances of GATT, there are also other ways of minimizing the risk of staleness, it is realized that there may be specific occasions where the use of a fixed-term appointment could be helpful.

VI. The third and fourth arguments remain of course valid, although the third objective is partly achieved through the trainee scheme and also through the close working relationship which exists in the GATT between the secretariat and national delegations.

VII. In the light of the above considerations the Board confirms the preliminary conclusion recorded in paragraph IX of its First Report to the effect that "taken as a whole the professional posts contained in the 1959 Manning Table constitute a permanent requirement for the secretariat as conceived at present" is sound. That establishment should moreover be considered a minimum for the regular activities of the secretariat, and within its present structure no particular post, nor any fixed proportion of the posts, should be earmarked for fixed-term incumbency only.

VIII. Nevertheless, as and when posts fall vacant in the normal course of events, the Executive Secretary should consider in the light of the remarks in this Report, whether it might be in the interests of the organization to fill such posts on a fixed-term basis, it being understood that this would not affect the permanent character of the posts.
IX. In addition there would be further scope for fixed-term appointments in connexion with purely temporary posts which are set up for a year or two for some ad hoc purpose, whether or not financed from extraordinary budgetary funds. The Board recommends that if and when such temporary posts are established (excluding consultants or experts appointed on a fee basis) normally appointments should be made on a fixed-term basis either by secondment from a national administration or otherwise.

X. As regards the use of fixed-term appointments purely for training purposes, the Board noted that the secretariat already provides for a trainee scheme for junior government officials mainly from the under-developed countries, financed out of UNTAA funds. This scheme might be further developed within financial limits set by the Technical Assistance Board, provided it does not unduly interfere with the regular duties of the professional officers charged with such training.

Signed: A. Pelt, Chairman
       W.H.J. van Asch van Wijck
       J. Cappelen
       A. Lethbridge
       R. Cook