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REPORT ON

WSCF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

27th W.S.C.F. GENERAL ASSEMBLY, JAN.30 - FEB.11, 1977

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA.

INTRODUCTION

This report is divided into four main parts: Section I deals with the formal report on the implementation of the publication programme as decided by the last Executive Committee Meeting (Longueuil, Quebec, Canada, Jan.20-28, 1976); Section II the evolution of our publications programmes during this quadrennium, and the perspective for the future; finally Section III deals with the context of the new inter-regional publication, A Quarterly WSCF Journal and its role in the context of the relations of regional to inter-regional publications; we also submit proposals for the consideration of this General Assembly.

I. With reference to the Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, there were basically two items to be implemented till this General Meeting:

- (a) the publication of the Newsletter, beginning with the March issue on the proceedings of the Executive Committee meeting, could not be fulfilled for purely financial reasons. Instead of the proposed March issue of the Newsletter, staff produced a voluminous and comprehensive account of the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting. Given the budget for publications which the same meeting guaranteed, and in view of the need for innovating a new publication within the same period, we reached the decision against further publication of the News-letter and also the Dossier.
- (b) the Executive Committee also authorised Geneva staff "to make use of the regional publications for inter-regional circulation and distribution". In this regard a full list of all the international and regional publications available was prepared and sent to all national and regional offices. In addition, we had to update the world-wide voluntary subscribers to WSCF publications about not only the publications available but also the policy changes to be expected. We appealed for their cooperation and continued support; we are glad to report that, much to our surprise, quite a sizeable number of them renewed their subscriptions to WSCF publications.

However, it must be reported that the demand for these publications from within the Federation, over the last one year has only steadily increased.

In order to explain this fact however, the basic question of the relevance and function of our publications to the tasks of the Federation at various levels, must periodically and consistently be analysed or reviewed in its details.

Outside the Federation however, these recent publications have made an increasingly positive impact and have proved both a commercial and educational success; an increasing number of ecumenical departments (e.g. within the World Council of Churches), European Churches and other educational bodies have purchased these publications at bulk rates: the visibility of our publications has modestly extended in other regions too.

The publication of The North America WSCF Newsletter, the newest regional publication, has been a most welcome step forward into both our constituency in North America, and the Donor and support community in the same region. Because of its strategic significance, the co-operation of other regions on a regular basis would greatly enhance the contents and status of this Newsletter.

II. WSCF Publications Programme: 1973-1977

1. The list of WSCF publications in your possession is comprehensive; it includes all the publications produced in this quadrennium and those still available from the past. During this quadrennium, the following were produced, either on a regular basis or as occasional publications - as indicated.

- 8 issues of WSCF Newsletter; Regular; all in English only.
- 10 issues of WSCF Dossier; Regular; mainly in English with some in French.
- a new issue of What Is WSCF?; in English only.
- an updated WSCF Directory; in English.
- Papers and Reports from WSCF Executive Committee Meeting in Canada, intended for Donors and the support community; only in English.
- An Appeal for a special Fund for Students exiles, refugees and political prisoners; in English.
- A quarterly WSCF Journal - sample copy in English.

2. Evaluation: a self-critical approach

The point of departure for an objective evaluation of our programme for publications during this quadrennium is the opening sentence of the Report of the Working Group on Publications and Communications at the last General Assembly. Having considered the problem at hand, the group concluded as follows :

"The group reported that it had worked under the limitation of a lack of definition of its task". (Emphasis added)
The report concludes:

"The report and comments were passed on to the Executive Committee".

In this way, our publications programme began on an uncharted path. Thereafter, it is correct to say, in retrospect, the problems confronted were seen mainly in narrow technical terms: financial, distribution, regularity of publications etc.

The fact that the last General Assembly did not clearly define the role and significance of our publications/communications programme is not the only reason that explains all the interim problems Geneva staff experienced in carrying out the limited publications programme. In our view, a second reason is traceable to our (i.e. staff and Executive Committee) hesitations about the role of the Geneva inter-regional office, conditioned by past struggles within the Federation which reached their peak at Addis Ababa. This latter attitude was the expression at the level of bureaucracy, of a certain attitude about the fundamental tasks of the Federation as a whole. In extreme cases, Geneva inter-regional office became no more than an inter-regional post office. Although this viewpoint was not theoretically clearly stated, its narrow pragmatism ruled the day.

But then dialectics is concrete; everything has its opposite. And as the Federation accumulated more and more experience in the context of a radically changing world, a number of assumptions underlying all our programmes, projects, relations, etc. came to be questioned. With regard to our publications, by the time of the Buenos Aires Executive Committee, only one year and a half after the beginning of the quadrennium, important questions were already being raised about the basis, process and content of this programme. The question however, in spite of all our genuine efforts to study the problem in the Workshop, was not resolved in Buenos Aires. The same old publications programme in substance continued, except where financially (again!) it was found impossible. This particular "solution" was not reached in isolation, however, again. managerial pragmatism took the upper hand.

It was not until the last Executive Committee Meeting in Canada, just over one year ago, that the fundamental question began to be posed, even then only a beginning, serious though it was. It was at that point in the life of the Federation during this quadrennium that, for many of us gathered there, we realised the basic fallacy of the pragmatic technical and static perspective we had all the time evinced when it came to discussing the rationale of our publications and, indeed, other projects too. One thing became clear, at least: that our viewpoint on a given programme was conditioned, in the main, by our overall perspective on the fundamental tasks of the Federation and, consequently, the dialectic of its internal mechanisms e.g. level, content and process of inter-relationship between the local, regional and inter-regional stages. At the conclusion of the raging debates and discussions on all the topical issues at Longueuil, the Executive Committee arrived at a comprehensive political evaluation of the tasks and functions of the Federation as a whole and the S.C.M. in particular. Hence, the Paper on Self-Understanding of the Federation. And it was in that context that a new outlook on the specific functions of our publications was conceived.

Thus, from presenting the problem of publications as a question mainly of lack of funds and other "technical" aspects, we reached, by way of concrete experience in the negative, the new formulation of the problem as, first and foremost a question of the historical tasks at hand. We have moved from the general to the particular, and in their interconnections. The problem of finance, for instance, having been the pivot of the previously pragmatic approach, was now placed in its new context. The problem of finance does not exist in a vacuum. Indeed its significance and role depend on the central tasks at hand: outside this, it is an abstraction and anything can be said about it.

Does this new search for a correct outlook on this and other questions demean the importance of Finance? The answer, obviously, is No! All that has happened is, not an increase in finances, but a new outlook on its significance. However, this too, has to be tested out in practice.

This section of the Report is written sharply in order to place the issue in its historical context.

III. The New WSCF Journal: Longueuil and After

1. The rationale and authority for a new WSCF Journal, will be found in the Self-understanding Paper and the Report and Working Paper on WSCF Communications and Publications to the last Executive Committee. This report should be read in conjunction with these two papers. Below, however, we will only highlight the significant points in these two papers by way of brief quotations.

- (a) It is important to understand why the paper on Self-understanding of the Federation concluded with an item on Publications/Communications of and within the Federation. This is done, unlike at the start of the quadrennium, in order to situate and stress the cardinal importance of the role of our publications programme.

The first point which was noted, therefore, was that the present inter-regional relations are greatly inhibited and limited, partly because of the form and content of communications we adopt. In other words, while inter-regional relations, in the framework of our tasks are considered as very important, we cannot simply wish them to be; they have to be created.

- (b) So, how the inter-regional relations? And why the Journal in this connection?

The answer given was "to facilitate meaningful exchange of experience and ideas". And the question of inter-regional relations was seen as "a basic need", an absolute historical necessity given the stage reached in the history of the Federation.

In the final analysis, the role of the new journal would be to serve as the inter-regional (inter-SCM) organ of the search for ever higher self-understanding of the Federation; this is to be done by way of mutual exchange of concrete experiences and ideas among and between the SCMs i.e. "from the masses to the masses". To elaborate upon this formulation, we should point out, that:

- this search is a process; it is not a happening, nor an end in itself. This journal shall be, in this way, the channel for this process. To this extent it is a journal of a running discussion not of spinning out idealist "solutions".
- Self-understanding is consciously created and not found as one would stumble across something; it is not flung at us by some unforeseen forces. Being intellectuals - our tools therefore being the products of our mind, added to the fact that being historical beings we acculumate concrete experiences such as in the practise of our faith, therefore the journal is the form of inter-connection we establish "to exchange experiences and ideas".
- historically, we are saying that unless this step is taken at this particular juncture of our history, we seriously risk being at total loss and without relevance in the contemporary changing world. "Within the Federation at the moment, there is no mechanism that facilitates mutual conversation and discussions between the SCMs at the various levels of their activities." Each SCM is proceeding, already, along a course unknown to most of its fellow SCMs around the world. This is a negative and not positive thing. Now, we are simply saying that it is in our power may benefit, to consciously change this awkward situation. Moreover, the "exchange of experiences and ideas" is not an end in itself but a method of reaching

an ever higher appreciation of concrete reality in order to change things. Finally, in terms of status, the WSCF Journal is not to be considered as a kind of official organ or mouthpiece of the WSCF. Such bureaucratic status symbol is not our concern. What is written in it is therefore the responsibility of the respective individual author(s) and not of the Federation.

- (c) As to the content of the Journal, or, rather, the content of this proposed inter-SCM communications, the Self-understanding Paper delineated those general but basic fields of areas of ongoing SCM-life activities, within which this process can occur: Education, Theology, and the experience in of the Church and Ecumenical life and Politics.
2. In the course of reaching the final decision, the Executive Committee discussed a number of anticipated problems, expected to be met in the process of initiating this project.

The first problem posed belongs to the very definition of the journal: how to ensure that SCM's, SCMerS and their friends will actually make written contributions, reflecting their concrete experiences. All the rich discussions on this question notwithstanding, the problem was/is a practical one. It was hoped that the SCM's took this decision as a self-challenge to themselves. Finally, the Geneva staff would accordingly show the lead:

"The inter-regional office would act as co-ordinator in such a way as to enable it to take a leading role at various points in order to promote the engagement of SCMs in practice".

The second problem was financial. Given the very stringent budget for the Geneva inter-regional office, the question of alternative sources of funding for the Journal logically imposed itself. In the same manner as with the first problem, this one too is a practical one.

However, both problems, it was felt, could be solved though over an extended period of time. Our experience over the last year, on the first question, is that it takes a lot of canvassing for individual contributors from SCMs. Below we will make a proposal to be considered here as a possible way out of this problem. On the second problem we report immediate though modest success. On a fund-raising trip made to a Swiss Church Missionary Bureau in Neuchatel, Switzerland, we found favourable hearing and we were promised upto Sw.Fr.20,000. This promise was made for 1977 and not 1976; that is why the rest of the 1976 budget for communications was used to finance the first sample of this new Journal. This promise was also made on the basis of calculations of the requirements of publishing the Journal on quarterly basis. Any further future prospects of financing this project will depend on the quality of its product. In the process of handling the two problems, therefore, modest steps forward have been made.

There is also a third problem: the relationship between the inter-regional publication(s) and the local regional and national ones. In principle there is no contradiction in this relationship. What is important to emphasize is that the inter-regional journal is neither superior nor substitute to the local publications; in the main it is intended to supplement all Federation publications at all levels. For instance, while the local publications may publish pieces of interesting local research in fields judged relevant to the given situation, the inter-regional publications are essentially a journal for reflection on concrete experiences and ideas and accordingly de-emphasize scholarly, academic and similar concerns.

This question of inter-relations between different Federation levels of publications is not a technical one. If, for instance, an article is reproduced at the inter-regional level, the criteria for its inclusion necessarily changes, at least according to the present conception of the function of the new journal.

Finally, it needs to be re-emphasized that the regional or local publications are geared, correctly, to local needs while the inter-regional publications highlight our mutual experience as SCM's around the world.

3. Proposals

We make these proposals on the basis legally of the authority of the last Executive Committee meeting on Communications and historically, out of our experience on the problems mentioned above. Arising out of inter-staff discussions, we now make the following proposals: (a) that given the outlook of things, it is strongly recommended to begin the full publication of the WSCF Journal as a quarterly after this Assembly.

(b) The formation of Regional or regionally-based study Commissions on each of the fields: Education, Theology, Church/Ecumenical Relations and Politics, whose duty will be to co-ordinate and in some cases initiate and lead regional concern and priorities in the respective fields. These Commissions are a function of both regional concerns (within the region) and inter-regional discussions. On the latter aspect, the Geneva publications will inter-act with the co-ordinator of these commissions; it is thus not a one-way relationship. Neither are these commissions intended to either duplicate present or future regional staff functions nor constitute another regional bureaucracy. By the very fact that they are study commissions, their role is determined in conjunction with regional priorities, and these priorities are, as usual, co-ordinated by the regional secretariat and guided by the respective regional committees. There should, therefore, be no confusion on authority either.

The strategic advantage we envisage in this approach is simply that on this basis the Federation begins to systematize and implant its inter-SCM process of mutual education and reflection in the regions. Even if these commissions be formed by only one individual on each discipline, yet it is surely worth trying where possible.

(c) Policy on Language(s) of publications remains an important problem; English continues to dominate our publications and may continue to do so in the future. While this problem is an important one and therefore necessitates discussions, it is proposed that we leave the question open for the translation of certain articles into the other official languages of the Federation: French and Spanish, according to expressed internal demands for them on the one hand, and our financial capacity on the other.

The Sample Copy of WSCF Journal

1. Between the time we begun the fund-raising drive and the solicitation for articles, quite a bit of effort and time was needed; in addition we have had to operate on the basis of relatively high Geneva costs of publication. The final product, now before you, is conditioned by all these factors;
 - the balance of articles between local SCM and non-local SCM (but within WSCF) articles is an even one; this is probably understandable for the first attempts. But it is our intention, under the slogan "from masses to masses", to increase the local SCM content, both quantitatively and qualitatively.
 - the general and external format of the Journal before you was the second best possible we could get given our limited finances; we had planned and still bear plans for a slightly larger format than this one.

We propose to retain the following sections :

Education

Politics

Theology/Church/Ecumenical Relations

Book Review

News Briefs

- the question of the permanent TITLE, a meaningful and attractive title, remains open and should be discussed here. We canvassed for suggestions and have only 2 alternatives; LIBERATION and NEW WORLD; but we propose to retain the sub-title, "A Quarterly".
2. Some local SCM articles arrived too late for inclusion in the present sample copy. Our plans for the next issue therefore include what has already been received and what has been strongly promised. The next issue(s) would therefore include the following:-
 - Politics : - Civil War in Lebanon and its geopolitics (Middle East)
 - A critique on Paper on Roundtable on Disarmament (NGO)
 - Discussions on Politics of this General Assembly
 - South Korea (Asia)
 - Theology : - Discussions on Theology of this General Assembly.
 - David Lockhead on A New Bible Reading (North America)
 - Dr.Koto's Paper on Theology in the Struggle for Justice read at the Cuba SCM General Assembly (Latin America).
 - Education : - Discussions on Education of this General Assembly.
 - Book Review - Marshall Fernando on Asia Peasant Theology
 - Peter Johnson on Essays on the New Testament, A Materialist Approach by Sergio Rostagno.