10. ‘A New Era in the World’s History’

Summary

Bruce, McDougall and Orr played significant roles in the formative years of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, sometimes recalling the ideas of 1935. That their world was changing rapidly and posing new problems does much to explain the difficulties they and their fellow idealists were to encounter.

As the 1943 conference called by Roosevelt approached, Britain and the United States agreed that the new organisation should be an advisory body; they feared a body with executive powers, as envisaged by Orr, would interfere with trade and commodity policies. There was confusion about its purpose: some, like J. M. Keynes, believed more fundamental economic problems should be solved first. Participants hailed the conference itself as a success, and a spirit of optimism prevailed. McDougall joined the Australian delegation at Hot Springs, and was appointed Australian representative on an interim commission established by the conference to prepare for the permanent organisation. His contribution to the work of the commission was significant: he was one of the most influential and active members of Committee C, responsible for preparing for the work of the organisation, and he chaired a ‘Reviewing Panel’ established to guide specialist committees of experts assisting Committee C.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was established by its first conference in 1945. Despite British Government opposition, failure to find another suitable candidate led to Orr becoming FAO’s inaugural Director-General; he appointed McDougall one of his two ‘special advisers’. The body was constrained by a small budget and by failure of the USSR to join. Its constitution was ambiguous, generally favouring an advisory role, but allowing room for an executive interpretation. In its first year it faced a world food crisis. Orr sidetracked the constitution by establishing a separate body, the International Emergency Food Council, to recommend production increases and direct supplies, and then sought approval to create a World Food Board to provide credit and hold surplus food stocks for distribution in time of need. US and British opposition forced the establishment of a preparatory commission to consider other proposals. Bruce headed the commission, which recommended
a World Food Council lacking the executive functions of Orr’s proposed board. The elected Council became the new executive of FAO, and Bruce its first chairman.

Orr left FAO in 1948 and was replaced by Norris E. Dodd, who focused on technical assistance. McDougall remained as ‘Counselor’, providing advice on policy and overseeing relations with other international organisations. His last important memorandum, ‘The Challenge to Western Civilization’, brought a Cold War interpretation to all that he had previously argued. He saw problems of development as paramount, for political as well as for economic reasons, and continued to believe that FAO could achieve its goals.

The Hot Springs Conference

As hasty preparations were made in Washington for the conference announced by the President, the London Observer published an article by John Boyd Orr, who wrote that ‘the carrying out of a world food policy based on nutritional needs will bring about revolutionary changes in our social and economic system’, changes benefiting ‘every class of the community’. The conference would adopt ‘a food policy based on needs’ and establish a ‘Technical Commission’ to report on food conditions in all countries. Economists and financiers would be asked to plan ‘a financial corporation’ to provide long-term credits, and ‘an International Agricultural and Food Commission’ would probably be set up to ‘arrange and control international trade in food and advise governments so that national schemes will fit in to the world scheme’. ‘This conference’, he concluded, ‘must mark the beginning of a new era in the world’s history’.

Policy advisers in Britain and in the United States had been considering postwar economic arrangements for more than a year before Roosevelt’s announcement of a food conference. Lend–Lease arrangements were made early in 1941; Article VII of the subsequent Mutual Aid Agreement and the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 laid out expansionary aims but no detailed means for achieving them. While they agreed that mistakes of the interwar period must not be repeated, the United States and the United Kingdom differed on the means to attain their agreed objectives. In both countries agriculture departments jealously guarded the right to protect farm incomes—in the United States by subsidising exports, cutting across the State Department’s aim of liberalising trade. In Britain agricultural policy focused on restricting imports. An empire lobby believing that Britain should make the most of its imperial advantages persisted. Britain would be a debtor nation by the end of the war, with few remaining assets and little

1 Observer, 25 April 1943.
trade; the United States would be a creditor; they approached postwar problems from different perspectives. Each blamed the other for the currency problems of the 1930s; many Americans believed problems had been compounded by development of the sterling area, which, together with the Ottawa preference agreements, was a focus of US resentment. In British eyes, the sterling area and the Ottawa agreements formed an interlocking defensive system allowing empire countries to build up ‘sterling balances’ in Britain, thereby enabling London to remain a financial centre and maintain a positive balance of trade with the United States. British policy emphasised the importance of postwar economic expansion, but there remained ‘extreme reluctance to abandon a system which combined imperial sentiment with seemingly solid economic advantages’.2

As Maynard Keynes in Britain and Harry Dexter White in the United States worked over their respective proposals for postwar arrangements for currency and trade, discussion between them and their advisers occurred from time to time, but formal intergovernmental negotiations were postponed. The US Government wanted to begin with trade talks, which had broken off in mid 1941; it was not yet prepared for monetary negotiations, while the British were not ready to negotiate trade and wanted monetary discussions first. As a result, there were no official talks on these fundamental questions until 1943. In the meantime, there was to be an official conference on food and agriculture.

Responses to the President’s announcement ranged from scepticism to hostility. After the first mention of the conference in the Pacific War Council, the British Ambassador in Washington commented that ‘it was an unwise proposal but that nothing was likely to come of it’. In Australia one official commented: ‘You cannot develop a useful conference out of this proposal’; and another: ‘you may be able to develop a conference that is less useless than it threatens to be.’3 A common reaction was puzzlement: why hold a conference on food when there were so many bigger problems? Keynes, who had been working for some 18 months on his plan for a clearing union to solve monetary problems bedevilling the previous decade, was ‘more dejected than I had ever seen him’, recalled Ernest Penrose, then Economic Adviser at the US Embassy in London. Having heard Penrose’s explanation of Roosevelt’s possible motives, Keynes replied: ‘What you are saying is that your President with his great political insight has decided that the best strategy for postwar reconstruction is to start with vitamins and then by a circuitous route work round to the international balance of payments!’ Penrose himself thought Roosevelt believed that ‘if the subject

3 NAA, A989, 43/735/740, cable S.24 from Dixon, 18 February; minutes of interdepartmental committee, 23 March 1943.
chosen was of common interest throughout the world and might be expected to bring wide agreement at least in aims’, it could ease the way towards ‘the more difficult political issues later’.4

The Washington bureaucracy was caught unawares. Dean Acheson claimed the conference had been ‘popped on the State Department’, and its officers did their best in the circumstances.5 Department of Agriculture officials complained that their expertise was ignored and they were not informed of plans.6 The War Department worried about transporting delegates over air routes across the Atlantic and the Pacific closed to all but military traffic and, with ‘an intense battle’ being waged in North Africa, could not undertake to give them priority.7 Although the conference was postponed from the April date first announced, preparations were rushed. Arranging the conference was perhaps the least taxing task. A more difficult one was to define its purpose and scope. Lester Pearson reported to Ottawa that there was ‘bewilderment’ in Washington about the purpose of the conference, noting Acheson’s view that ‘the best chance of useful work being done by it would be to take as a basis of deliberation the “McDougall Report” on Nutrition of October 1942’.8

The invitation received in Australia stated US belief that it was time to begin ‘joint consideration of the basic economic problems’ likely to confront the world after ‘attainment of complete military victory’; allied and associated governments would exchange ‘views and information’ on topics including plans for postwar food production, import requirements and exportable surpluses, possible agreements and institutions to achieve efficient production and adequate supplies; trade and financial arrangements; and coordination of national policies for improving nutrition and consumption.9 Acheson responded to criticism that the agenda attempted to cover too much ground: by taking the broader picture and ‘directing attention to an expanding agricultural economy, the danger of concentrating upon restrictive commodity schemes would be avoided’. The purpose was to ‘work towards broader objectives and emphasize the new responsibility of governments to see that their people are well fed’.10 No doubt he also hoped that breadth of subject matter would avoid the difficulty of reaching an agreed US policy; there remained a significant gap between Agriculture’s lingering fear of surpluses and instinct for production restrictions, and State’s policy of freer trade.

5 NAA, A2937, Post War Food, Halifax to FO, 10 April 1943.
6 NAC, RG 25, Vol. 2261, 5050-C-40, Scott to Pearson, 1 April 1943.
7 USNA, 550.ADI/189, Secretary of War to Secretary of State, 22 April 1943.
9 NAA, A989, 43/735/740, Note, 26 March 1943.
10 USNA, Harley Notter files, Box 80, records of State Department Committees, E Minute 44, 7 May 1943.
The Australian Legation in Washington reported that Roosevelt ‘has no acute economic sense, and he did not appreciate the fact that a conference on plans for postwar food could achieve very little unless some degree of prior agreement had been reached on trade and the exchanges’. Some members of the British Government feared the conference could endorse production or export restriction, the method favoured in the 1930s to increase farm incomes, thus raising food prices; others were anxious about a possible threat to imperial preference arrangements. Formally, the British suggested an explicit statement that the conference would be held within the context of the Atlantic Charter and Article VII of the Mutual Aid Agreement, thus favouring expansionary trade policies.\footnote{NAA, A989, 43/735/740/1, Department of External Affairs comment on Note from Washington Legation, 14 April 1943.} No such statement was made, perhaps because of division among policy makers in Washington. Britons and Americans were nevertheless united in wanting to avoid concrete proposals: the conference should be ‘technical’ rather than political; hence the invitation specified ‘a small number of appropriate technical and expert representatives’. It was to be a low-key ‘technical wartime meeting’; dress would be ‘business suits only’, and wives were not invited.\footnote{NAC, RG 25, Vol. 2261, 5050-C-40, US Legation, Ottawa, to Secretary EA, 10 April 1943; Secretariat of Food Conference, undated note.} An announcement that the press would be excluded raised controversy in Washington.

‘A feeling of great trust and faith in the future’

A special train transported delegates to the spa resort of Hot Springs, Virginia, in the Allegheny Mountains, some 250 miles (400 km) south-west of Washington. The conference might have been ‘low key’ compared with prewar international conferences, but it was a luxurious experience for delegates from war-affected countries, and there were at least some vestiges of pomp and circumstance: ‘plenary sessions and flags flying, orchestras playing and state dinners, and cocktail parties and so on.’ Most remarkable was the atmosphere. Howard Tolley recalled:

I had hopes that this would be a great forward step toward lasting peace...We really expected big things out of the conference before we ever went to Hot Springs. As preparations for it went along most of us felt more and more hopeful that great things would come out of it.\footnote{HLH, ‘Tolley’, pp. 581–6.}

Accounts record almost universal goodwill and optimism. Norway’s Dr K. Evang commended the ‘absence of academic hair-splitting discussion’ and found ‘after
the first 2 or 3 days there was a feeling of strong optimism and after a week a spirit of enthusiasm’. An outstanding feature had been the unreserved cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. There was ‘a feeling of great trust and faith in the future’. McDougall thought that ‘nations are bolder and prepared for more far-reaching and constructive suggestions in 1943 than they were in 1937’. He welcomed the appointment as delegates of ‘technical and expert people who really did know something about the subject they were discussing’, and their authority for full discussion without commitment.  

But British economist Lionel Robbins wrote in his diary: ‘It is very easy to be friendly in a luxury hotel with all expenses paid and no binding commitments on the agenda. When we did touch on bread and butter questions…opinion was by no means so united.’

Much of the credit for the prevailing optimism must go, nevertheless, to the British delegation. Paul Appleby believed that he had influenced British thinking about ‘the McDougall plan’ during a visit to London late in 1941. At the request of Welles, backed by Winant, Appleby set out to lobby in favour of liberal trade policies after Keynes had alarmed Washington by predicting that Britain’s dire postwar situation would demand exchange controls, trade quotas and limits on consumption in order to maximise exports. Appleby saw a number of ministers and found Lord Woolton, the Food Minister, to have ‘a very favourable reaction to the McDougall plan’. He believed Woolton’s influence helped ensure the British delegation to Hot Springs was a high-level one and that it was briefed according to Woolton’s expansive views. ‘Extremely gratified’ to find that in fact the United States shared their view that the conference should be limited to exploration of problems and possible means of resolution, the British made every effort to facilitate its success. The State Department for its part was reassured by circulation of a British paper by J. P. R. Maud of the Ministry of Food. Maud argued for expansion of trade and employment, opposed restriction of production and advocated education, pooling of information and coordination of research.  

A notable omission from the British delegation was John Boyd Orr, still considered to be an outspoken and politically dangerous ‘crank’ in Whitehall. Bruce had lobbied British ministers for his inclusion in some capacity, but was forced to report failure despite American wishes that he should attend: ‘my impression is [ministers] are afraid of him even as an adviser.’ From a diplomatic
point of view, the delegation was nevertheless an impressive one. Led by Junior Foreign Minister Richard Law, its 10 delegates, accompanied by a team of advisers, represented no less than eight Whitehall departments. Several—among them Law and Lionel Robbins, an academic economist then Director of the Economic Section at the War Cabinet Offices—were to attend subsequent conferences, including Bretton Woods. P. H. Gore-Booth, of the Washington Embassy, wrote of a determination to ‘retain political leadership’ despite being surpassed by the United States in ‘material achievement and power’, by means of ‘on the spot merit’. The British paid attention to minutiae of procedure and protocol, undertaking to entertain every one of the other delegations to dinners or cocktail parties, and holding regular delegation meetings in order to identify their own internal difficulties and present a united front.20 After the first full day, they reported to London:

...the absence of general discussion seems to indicate that no delegation except the Australians and ourselves have as yet a well thought-out consistent and positive policy. The Americans certainly have ideas but they are not yet decided and in any case are concerned not to throw too much weight about...It is noteworthy that neither the Russians nor the Chinese spoke at all today.

J. E. Coulson commented: ‘general apathy and indecision not altogether surprising in view of the shortness of time and the general obscurity about objects...Although we probably dreaded this conference more than anyone, we seem to be the only Delegation which has been able to put forward any positive ideas.’21 The effort put into these is evident in cables and records of daily delegation meetings.22 Australia’s J. B. Brigden found the British delegation ‘outstanding’ and ‘uniformly excellent’.23

The Australian delegation played a significant role at Hot Springs. It was led by H. C. Coombs, recently appointed Director of Post-War Reconstruction and advocate of what was described as ‘the positive approach’ to Article VII of the Mutual Aid Agreement. The positive approach shared with the nutrition initiative an emphasis on improved standards of living as a goal of public policy, but it was more broadly conceived, interpreting the Atlantic Charter and Article VII as a commitment to encourage expansion of trade and higher living standards, including responsibility to assist underdeveloped countries to raise theirs, and national and international commitment to policies of full employment. The approach reversed important strands of traditionally protectionist Labor policy

21 UKNA, FO371/35373, British Delegation to FO, 5, 19 May; minute by Coulson, 21 May.
22 UKNA, FO371/3572-8, passim.
in its willingness to question imperial preference and to oblige countries to spend their credit balances, while continuing to uphold Australia’s right to extend its own manufacturing industries. The positive approach was to be formally espoused by the Labor Government in 1944; it offered ‘an internationalism of [Labor’s] aspiration, to substitute for the predatory internationalism that they feared’. It would see Australian delegations at international conferences ‘in another kind of Keynesian crusade’ attempting to ‘use Keynesian analysis with its emphasis on sustaining demand as the basis of reform of the international economic order’. By the time he reached Hot Springs, Coombs had discovered an emphasis on employment policy in London. US officials, however, believed it would be unacceptable to Congress.24

McDougall was also a member of the Australian delegation. Coombs found him ‘a very interesting bloke, a bit of a charlatan, but a very appealing one with an element of good sense in the line that he was taking...a kind of virtuous con-man’.25 Coombs noted that McDougall was working ‘quite closely in collaboration with the Americans’. ‘They appear to be seeking his advice and criticism on the preparation of material and the working out of the plans for the Conference. This is proving quite valuable to us.’26

Dean Acheson led the US delegation at Hot Springs, but attended only spasmodically. Delegates remained in constant touch with the State Department by telephone tie line. Howard Tolley thought the United States made less effort to influence policy at this conference than at later ones.27 They, too, held meetings to decide policy, but on occasion there was open division.28

The Hot Springs Resolutions

The conference divided into four sections: I) Consumption Levels and Requirements; II) Expansion of Production and Adaptation to Consumption needs; III) Facilitation and Improvement of Distribution; IV) Recommendations for Continuing and Carrying forward the Work of the Conference. All sections except IV comprised several committees, and all committees prepared resolutions. The Final Act of the Hot Springs Conference included 33 resolutions on the need for international action to increase and promote agricultural production, technical skills and consumption, and on individual governments’ responsibility to ensure a sufficient food supply. The text of the resolutions fills nearly 17 long

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25 Rowse, Coombs, p. 123, citing Coombs in interview with Sean Turnell; Coombs, Trial Balance, p. 41.
26 NAA, M448, 11, [3]. Coombs to J. B. Chifley, 23 April 1943.
28 UKNA, FO371/35378; Gore-Booth, draft memorandum, ‘Food Conference’.
pages of fine print. Section IV prepared the resolution to establish an Interim Commission to formulate ‘a specific plan for a permanent organization in the field of food and agriculture’. The Commission’s chief task would be to draft a constitution. The permanent organisation would come into being once that constitution was signed by 20 nations.  

As a result of British determination to oil the wheels, the goodwill of all participants and a general aspiration to make use of this unprecedented opportunity to build a better world, the Hot Springs Conference had succeeded against all expectations. Yet the British encountered one difficulty at its conclusion. They had hoped that Section IV would recommend the permanent organisation be limited to collection of information and research, but the Americans would not agree: ‘The best we could do was to get agreement that it should not be mandatory for the Interim Commission to include…functions of an executive nature.’

The conference in fact had issued a clarion call, its formal resolutions beginning with a declaration that ‘freedom from want of food, suitable and adequate for the health and strength of all peoples, can be achieved’. First, it continued, the war must be won, and in the immediately following critical period, urgent efforts must be made to economise consumption, increase supplies and distribute them to best advantage. Then equal efforts must be made to win and maintain freedom from fear and from want: ‘The one cannot be achieved without the other.’ Until then there had ‘never been enough food for the health of all people. This is justified neither by ignorance nor by the harshness of nature.’ Production must be greatly expanded, requiring ‘imagination and firm will on the part of each government and people’. ‘The first cause of hunger and malnutrition is poverty.’ There must therefore be ‘an expansion of the whole world economy to provide the purchasing power sufficient to maintain an adequate diet for all’. Primary responsibility lay with each nation, and the committee recommended all governments adopt the conference findings and recommendations, urging ‘early concerted discussion of the related problems falling outside the scope’ of Hot Springs. The first steps, nevertheless, should be taken without waiting for solution of other problems.
The Interim Commission

McDougall had been rapporteur of Section IV, and the final document probably demonstrates his influence. He was dubbed ‘Father of the Conference’, but otherwise took no very prominent role at Hot Springs. The Interim Commission, on which he again represented Australia, was a body better suited to his methods; there he operated as he had on the EMB and IEC: not occupying its most prominent position, yet steering its work to a considerable extent by virtue of his diligence, knowledge and ideas. He did not lack opposition. The nascent organisation was already subject to political manipulation from the major powers. British civil servants, and Minister of Agriculture, R. S. Hudson, in particular, had a list of *persona non grata*. They had been able to prevent Orr from attending Hot Springs and made it clear he should have nothing to do with the Interim Commission. At Hot Springs they had also successfully objected to the appointment of the Canadian Secretary of the International Wheat Conference, Andrew Cairns, as secretary to Section IV, a move causing unease in Washington and Ottawa. After much discussion, British civil servants agreed it would be impolitic to make a second objection to Cairns, against whom they really had nothing except his ‘enthusiasm and strongly held views’.33 They were, however, determined that neither McDougall nor Paul Appleby should be appointed Chair of the Interim Commission.34 By suggesting that neither a Briton nor an American should occupy the chair, they could avoid the problem of Appleby, the precise objection to whom they could not then adequately explain, but which related to US agricultural policy. Despite Appleby’s advocacy of expansionary policies in London in 1941, he had been known to favour international planning of agriculture and restriction of production, along the lines of the 1930s US AAA.35

Britain would prefer that the Chairman of the Interim Commission represent one of the dominions. Australian participation at Hot Springs had been the most impressive, but suggesting an Australian occupy the chair might lead to McDougall’s appointment. After Coombs, McDougall had been the member of the Australian delegation ‘most in evidence’ and ‘the fact that he had played some part in the promotion of the Conference and has certain ambitions connected with the outcome…rather complicated matters at times’. Alarm increased as the British Embassy in Washington reported that McDougall had circulated a memorandum proposing the commission meet quickly to ‘begin work on all aspects of the food problem’, and suggesting formation of a series of expert committees including, possibly, one on commodity arrangements, which was

33 UKNA, FO371/35380, minutes by Coulson, 4 and 11 July; Ronald, 5 August; FO to Washington for Twentyman, 12 August; notes by Twentyman, ‘IC4’, 26 July.
34 Ibid., FO371/35377, minute by Coulson, 5 July; Coulson to Clutterbuck, 7 July; FO to Washington, 6 July.
35 Ibid., FO371/35373, Sixth meeting of UK Delegation, 12 May.
‘obviously dangerous’. The British were overly fearful: in the event the task of chairing the commission went to Canada’s Lester Pearson, for whom McDougall, who had never wanted it, had lobbied energetically.

The international organisations formed at the end of World War II are now taken for granted as part of the world order. It is difficult to appreciate the magnitude and complexity of the task facing their founders. The Interim Commission had three main objectives: first to draft a ‘formal declaration or agreement’ recognising governments’ obligations to raise standards of living and nutrition, to improve agricultural efficiency, to cooperate with other governments on these matters and to report on progress; second, to prepare a specific plan for the new organisation; and third, to initiate preliminary statistical investigations and research into problems likely to face the organisation, so that once established it could begin work immediately. The commission, comprising representatives of the 44 nations at Hot Springs, and occupied Denmark, was formally inaugurated on 15 July 1943, only six weeks after the conference concluded, showing, in Acheson’s words, a ‘clear indication of the earnestness with which the United Nations have undertaken their commitments and the vigor with which they are prepared to carry them out’.

The Interim Commission existed for more than two years, located from October 1943 in its permanent home: 2841 McGill Terrace, a mansion in a leafy area of central Washington. Most rooms became offices, while ‘the commission and its committees and advisory panels met in the dining room around a huge oak table’. The full commission met infrequently, but members were entitled to attend any of its committee meetings. This meant that an enthusiastic member like McDougall could be involved in nearly all of its activities. Most members were Washington-based diplomats, with heavy workloads, particularly as the pace of planning for postwar organisations increased. McDougall remained on Bruce’s staff in London. He spent long periods in Washington, returning to London whenever Bruce needed him. When in Washington, he took an interest in other areas of postwar planning, and in some leftover business of the League of Nations, but he was able to devote most of his time to the commission.

McDougall told Bruce:

37 NAA, A2937, Post War Food, ‘Suggestions on Methods of Work of the Interim Commission’, n.d. This document appears to be part of McDougall’s memorandum, discussed in the preceding paragraph and summarised in telegram 2772 from Washington to FO, 17 June.
38 NAC, RG 25, Vol. 2261, 5050-B-40C, part i, Address of Welcome by Acheson, 15 July.
40 NAA, A2937, Post War Food, McDougall to Bruce, 22 July 1943.
...the Interim Commission does not go well when I am away. There is no driving force and not too much knowledge. The staff is hard working but not competent and of the Commission only Pearson, Twentyman and Appleby are really competent and none of them devote much time to the work of the Commission.

Its committees included ‘a lot of good experts’, but ‘they only see part of the picture’. ‘All the hard work [on the commission report] has been done by a drafting sub-committee aided by Cairns and a very good American, [Gove] Hambidge, both of whom were lent for this purpose.’

The records show that Pearson and McDougall, with the Agent-General for India in Washington, Sir Girja Bajpai, the US representative, Appleby for the first year and then Howard Tolley, and Edward Twentyman of the United Kingdom, constituted an informal inner circle, exchanging and assessing ideas. When they agreed, as they usually did, a suggestion was likely to go ahead. McDougall had known and respected Bajpai since their days together on the IEC; Tolley found him ‘an especially good parliamentarian’, impressive in his chairmanship of committees at Hot Springs.

Twentyman, a senior Treasury official, was based at the British Food Mission in Washington. He was described as a ‘fearless’ and ‘dynamic’ administrator, of somewhat ‘unconventional’ dress and manner; ‘some of his best work was done fishing in troubled waters’. His death in an air accident while returning to Washington in March 1945 is a reminder of the discomforts and dangers faced by all who travelled constantly in the cause of the new world order.

Committee C

Decisions of the Interim Commission were taken by three committees; their scope was bounded by the Hot Springs resolutions. Committee A drafted the formal agreement by all participating nations to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural efficiency, cooperate with other nations and submit periodical reports on progress. Committee A’s work was largely complete by August 1943. Committee B devised the structure and constitution of FAO, dealing with some contentious issues, particularly concerning financial contributions. Committee C provided some assistance to Committee B, but its chief task was to prepare for the work of the new organisation, including initiation of preliminary statistical investigations and research. It did not commence serious work until late 1943 when Committee B’s work was nearing completion. On the bones created by

41 Ibid., M104, 12(4), McDougall to Bruce, 28 June 1943, 16 January 1944.
43 The Times, obituary, 17 April 1945.
B, C was to develop flesh. McDougall was well placed to influence the shape of the new organisation. Formally, he was a member of Committee C, but he also participated in the drafting subcommittee of Committee A.\footnote{A copy of Committee A’s final draft, approved on 11 August 1943, is in NAA, A989, 43/735/740.}

It seems to have been McDougall’s suggestion that the commission form two advisory panels of experts, on science and on economics, to assist with their planning. Bajpai subsequently agreed that each of these should be able to appoint subcommittees.\footnote{NAA, A2937, Post War Food, McDougall to Bruce, 2 August.} This decision to form panels of technical advisers would set the pattern for the work of the commission throughout 1944. There was a sense of urgency in discussions by then; Interim Commission members expected the 20 acceptances necessary to form the new organisation well before the end of the year, after which it must begin work without delay. Late in 1943 McDougall had listed possible preparatory tasks to be undertaken by Committee C, from which the Commission Secretariat selected the three most urgent in January 1944. The first task was to represent the interests of food and agriculture at any UN conference: FAO must not be caught unprepared by a sudden summons to an international conference. The second was to enable the Director-General and the Council of FAO ‘to envisage the tasks confronting them and to determine on questions of relative urgency’; this preparation should begin with a general survey of the food and agriculture position in each country. The third task was to facilitate the work of FAO by measures such as establishing links with research and academic institutions, particularly with a view to drawing on their personnel. Committee C agreed on 2 February 1944 that the most urgent of the three was preparation of conference papers. A joint committee of Committee C and the Commission Secretariat subsequently recommended preparation of memoranda for conferences on agricultural credit, commodity control, commercial policy, monetary stablisation, employment problems and transport. Committee C also recommended that commencement of country-by-country surveys begin immediately, as ‘functioning in vacuo could only lead to fumbling and delay, at a moment when delay might be fatal to the prospects of the organization’.\footnote{NAC, RG 25, Vol. 2261, File 5050-B-40C, part 2, C Doc 4, 2 February 1944.} Information, arranged both by countries and by subjects, should be prepared forthwith. The recommendation listed one and half pages of topics on which data might be collected.\footnote{Ibid., part 3, ‘Draft Report of Committee C to the Interim Commission’, n.d.} It was soon realised that commission funds and time would limit the studies to samples in a few countries to assist FAO in later planning.\footnote{Ibid., part 4, ‘Ex. Min 26’, 28 April 1944; ‘Subcom. on Agric Prod, Min. 4’, 15 May.}
McDougall spent much of February and March 1944 in London as part of Australia’s delegation to meetings of British Commonwealth officials on international economic collaboration. Pearson cabled him that progress of deliberations was slower than he had wished, but the program of work adopted ‘has been more or less as you outlined it’. McDougall’s ‘panel procedure [that is, the formation of subcommittees to the main panels] should…be applied at once’. By May four such panels—on forestry, fisheries, agricultural production and food management—were established. The secretariat ‘would not be in any way responsible for the nature or quality of their work’, but there would be a ‘Research Reviewing Committee (or some such name) through which these panels would report to Committee C. This will be an extremely important group.’ What came to be called the ‘Reviewing Panel’ was apparently Pearson’s idea and he went on to propose that McDougall chair it, adding ‘it really would be a key job on the Interim Commission from now on’.49

Pearson probably ascribed such importance to the Reviewing Panel because the experts would not be subjected to bureaucratic interference in making their recommendations for the new organisation. The Reviewing Panel, and its chair in particular, was to help them to understand what sort of guidance would be needed by an organisation unlike any that had existed previously.50

Minutes of meetings between panels and the Reviewing Panel show how the system worked. The latter vetted and amended terms of reference. Should wood pulp come within FAO’s ambit? Should there be a statistical study for the years 1945 to 1950? Was there a need for panels on statistics and marketing?51 It was necessary to explain a broader picture to scientists steeped in the minutiae of their own fields. McDougall dealt tactfully with the forestry panel’s unanimous desire for a separate deputy director-general for forestry.52 He asked the fisheries panel to provide ‘a general review of the place of fisheries in the world economy’, ranging through nutritive values, contributions of fisheries to world food supply, advances in processing and culture, undeveloped fishing areas, problems of organised fishery industries and non-commercial fisheries, and international collaboration in sustaining resources. The report should show how FAO could become ‘the central world organization to promote and foster fisheries and fishery industries’.53

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49 Ibid., part 3, Pearson to McDougall, 4 March 1944.
50 See summary by Joint Committee Chairman, Haidari, in ibid., Part 5, Ex. Min. 27, 5 May 1944.
52 Ibid., Part 7, Subcom. on Forestry, Min. 2, 26–28 June 1944.
53 Ibid., vol. 2263, part 9, Subcom. on Fisheries, Min. 2, 31 July 1944.
The Reviewing Panel did more than provide guidance for expert committees. Its members mapped out the tasks and the philosophy of the organisation as a whole. In August 1944, they discussed preparation of their report to FAO's founding conference. Although it was assumed that the final report of the Interim Commission would suggest action, McDougall warned against making formal recommendations, thereby inviting a charge of attempting to do the work of the conference, since the conference was to be the supreme policymaking body of the organisation. He approved preparation of a memorandum on the ‘economic setting’ since, under Hot Springs Resolution XXIV, the general report to FAO ‘must be related to the economic setting’. Tolley went further: since purchasing power, an expanding economy and international cooperation were all factors determining food purchases, perhaps FAO should make recommendations to other agencies concerning industrial development, international trade and commodity arrangements. McDougall agreed that industrialisation would be necessary in some countries to achieve the Hot Springs goals, as was international cooperation. ‘Should not the FAO Conference, for example, make recommendations to governments concerning this need for industrialization?’ There was general agreement that it should.54

The panel discussed FAO’s role in relation to agricultural commodity arrangements. Wheeler asked: ‘If FAO is not to organize and activate commodity agreements, how is it to get its views expressed and acted upon by another body? How is it to see that national plans are properly coordinated?’ Tolley argued that Hot Springs resolutions obliged FAO to ensure international action either through another organisation or by organising international commodity agreements itself. McDougall predicted greater government intervention in agricultural production in the future. Without coordination of national programs, ‘the trend may become extremely nationalistic’. He proposed a statement explaining the need for coordination and recommending a conference to develop principles governing all commodity agreements. The panel agreed, Tolley emphasising in ensuing discussion the importance of seeing that ‘the right kind of agreements are drawn up’, particularly in regard to their contribution to agricultural reorientation.55

Constitutional Ambiguity

Some Interim Commission members wanted ‘a strong food and agriculture organization which could take positive steps to foster economic expansion and help prevent disastrous crises’; others wanted ‘a rather narrowly limited

54 Ibid., Rev. Pan. Min. 7, 2 August 1944.
55 Ibid., 3 August 1944.
fact-gathering and advisory agency…closely insulated from positive action’. McDougall took an intermediate view, preferring an advisory body, dependent for influence on ‘its own efficiency and competence’, on the seriousness with which member nations took the obligation to report, and on arrangements for international investment. He wanted the organisation to have a say in international discussions on issues within FAO’s ambit, but believed there should be a separate international advisory body for commodity agreements. He told Twentyman at one point that FAO should not be ‘besmirched’ by having ‘anything to do with the damned merchants’.56

In the view of one FAO officer, the constitution devised by the Interim Commission and approved by member states was a compromise between the strong active body and the advisory one. It was ‘more on the advisory than the action side but with the way open, constitutionally, to develop in whatever direction the member nations might find most useful’.57 The relevant paragraphs of Article I listed obligations to ‘collect, analyze, interpret, and disseminate information’ and to ‘promote and…recommend national and international action’ in relevant fields. But it was also to ‘furnish such technical assistance as governments may request’ and to ‘organize…such missions as may be needed to assist’ governments to fulfil obligations arising from acceptance of the Hot Springs recommendations, and ‘to take all necessary and appropriate action to implement the purposes of the Organization’.58

This constitutional ambiguity increased British anxiety. Whitehall was alarmed by the committee structures established by Committee C, by its ‘ginger group outlook’ and by its extension of activity into new fields. Twentyman was instructed to ‘remonstrate against the way Committee C is extending its functions to cover postwar economic problems’. Its tendency to tackle ‘outlying subjects’, albeit lying within its ambit, such as forestry, would stretch its limited resources and ‘wreck FAO’. They hoped the chosen Director-General would ‘develop the organisation along the lines we envisage, i.e. a fact-finding, educational and advisory body’.59

The Search for a Director-General

Members of the Interim Commission wanted the Director-General to be selected before the conference that would formally inaugurate FAO. McDougall’s first

56 UKNA, FO371/35381, McDougall to Twentyman, 11 August 1943; FO371/35380, Twentyman, ‘IC 1, Interim Commission on Food and Agriculture: Commodity Arrangements’, 23 July 1943.
58 NAA, A989 44/735/743, text of Australian Bill to approve constitution of FAO, read 19 September, enacted November 1944.
59 UKNA, BT11/2375, FO to Washington, 7 and 14 May 1944.
choice as director-general, approved by Lester Pearson, was Henry Wallace. As it was not yet clear whether Roosevelt would select Wallace as his fourth-term running mate, other options were needed. McDougall thought Bruce would be ‘splendid’, but preferred him for a bigger job—perhaps chairing the ‘Overall Economic and Social Council’. Orr might be possible, although ‘Whitehall would be difficult’. Bruce saw that Wallace ‘might be regarded by some as a starry-eyed dreamer’, an opinion likely to be fostered by ‘the reactionary elements in America’. He was dubious about Orr, and agreed that he himself ‘might be able to do more useful work in other directions’. McDougall then suggested Bruce take the job ‘to give the organisation a flying start’, before moving to ‘the more central office’. McDougall tossed in several other names without much enthusiasm, but rejected suggestions by some delegates that he be a candidate himself: ‘I have warmly repudiated the idea stressing the need for a big man with both a name and abilities.’ He would be interested in the deputy job if Wallace were chosen, but if it fell to Bruce, the deputy could not be Australian, and he would settle for a personal assistant position.60

The British Government opposed Wallace, carefully avoiding naming him in messages to the embassy in Washington warning against ‘the appointment of an eminent US agrarian mystic’ or ‘a political crusader, especially one connected with US agrarian politics’.61 They urged the State Department that a director-general should be chosen for administrative and scientific abilities rather than ‘general public eminence’.62 As with the Interim Commission, they preferred a dominion candidate, but remained fearful that Australia would nominate McDougall. The British Embassy in Washington reported that Pearson, not interested himself, suggested McDougall ‘ought to get a senior post in the organisation’ and could not suggest anyone else outside Britain and the United States.63

In fact McDougall’s views, particularly on the contentious issue of commodity control, had proved to be moderate and acceptable to British representatives in Washington. Enclosing a letter from McDougall setting out his views on the commission, Twentyman acknowledged him as one of the key members of the commission, and reported his own view that ‘whatever may be said about M’s general proclivities [he was] fairly sensible and sound…my own present inclination is to temper my natural caution towards him with a goodly measure of appreciation of him as a genuine supporter of our own objectives’.64 Twentyman told McDougall frankly of British concerns, and that he had warned Appleby

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60 NAA, M104, 12(4), McDougall to Bruce, 1 and 28 June; Bruce to McDougall, 17 June 1944.
61 UKNA, BT11/92, minute H. J. Habakkuk, 20 May; BT11/2375, FO to Washington, 13 May 1944.
62 Ibid., minute, Habakkuk, 2 May 1944; USNA, 550.AD1, Interim Commission/5, memorandum of conversation, Stonebower and Gore-Booth, 19 May 1944.
63 UKNA, BT11/2375, Snelling, DO, to Coulson, FO, 2 June 1944; Holmes to DO, 17 May 1944.
64 Ibid., FO371/35381, Twentyman to W. J. Hasler, 12 August; McDougall to Twentyman, 11 August 1943.
against making McDougall chair of an important committee, as it ‘might cause some U.K. folk to think that the Commission was being dominated by extremists’. McDougall replied that he did not wish to chair a committee. The British did not realise that McDougall was probably as unacceptable to Canberra as he was to Whitehall. Just as senior British representatives in Washington found him more reasonable than did their masters in London, Australian representatives like Coombs formed more favourable views than those at home. J. F. Murphy, then Controller-General of Food, believed that ‘for various reasons Mr McDougall would have little influence with his Minister or with the Australian Food Council’.

The New Organisation

Disappointing many expectations, FAO was not established in 1944. A chief reason was the US political process in a presidential election year with an increasingly obstructive Congress. The United States did not formally accept FAO’s Constitution until after the election in November. In the meantime, the Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944 had set in train the formation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The war in Europe took a little longer than expected to end, but then the Pacific war ended abruptly only three months later. That ending brought with it devastation previously unimagined. At the Quebec conference inaugurating FAO in October 1945, the US delegate spoke of two scientific facts that made it ‘impossible for us to go on taking hunger for granted’. First, the atomic bomb had shown ‘that we must not have another war. And that means we must not permit the pangs of hunger to bring about those basic fears and greed which result in war.’ Second, science and technology now made hunger unnecessary. Another shadow over the conference warned that wartime cooperation was waning. Members of the USSR delegation participated fully in the conference, as they had done at Hot Springs, and in the Interim Commission. But days passed without their signature to the Constitution; they were finally forced to report that they had been instructed not to sign. The USSR did not become a member. The postwar world was already divided.

Efforts before the conference to find a director-general had failed, though some 17 names had been canvassed. Orr had been persuaded—much against his

65 NAA, A2937, Post War Food, McDougall to Bruce, 17 July 1943.
66 NAA/CSIR, series 3, PH/McD/54, Richardson to Rivett, 18 February 1944.
wishes—to go to Quebec as an ‘unofficial’ member of the British delegation. On
the journey across the Atlantic, he told other members of ‘the futility of the
kind of organisation it was proposed to set up’; he spent much of his time in
Quebec as a tourist and renewing scientific friendships. He was persuaded by
some delegates to address the conference, and in a stirring speech urged them
to reject the recommended constitution. There was no need for more science to
show that the world had insufficient food for health. They should seek to give
the organisation ‘funds and authority to enable [it] to promote the production
and better distribution of some of the main foodstuffs as the beginning of a
world policy’. Although the proposed constitution was accepted, Orr, reluctant
still, agreed to take on the director-generalship:

I decided to have a shot at putting the organisation on the right lines,
and if I failed, as seemed to me likely, to retire with honour satisfied. So
I accepted, but only for two years, which seemed long enough to get the
organisation established with executive powers if governments could be
persuaded to agree, and too long if that should prove impossible.

He began work ‘in a gloomy and grim mood’.69

Figure 18 FAO Director-General, John Boyd Orr (centre), with Special
Advisers F. L. McDougall (left) and S. L. Louwes (right).

Source: E. McDougall.

69 Orr, As I Recall, pp. 161–5.
Orr immediately appointed two ‘special advisers’: S. L. Louwes, Netherlands Director-General of Food, and McDougall. Orr’s first intention had been to appoint McDougall as Deputy Director-General, but the executive felt that another ‘Anglo-Saxon’ should not be appointed without two more deputies of other nationalities. It was not, McDougall later wrote, ‘very satisfactory from a personal point of view’. It was at first a temporary secondment, but a year later became a five-year appointment as ‘Counselor’—effectively ‘the second person in the organisation’ who would act for the Director-General in his absence. As an international civil servant, McDougall then resigned from all other positions held on behalf of Australia, and even from a personal appointment to the Court of Governors of the London School of Economics. FAO became his life from then on.

FAO had a budget for its first year of US$2.5 million, and $5 million per annum thereafter. Orr adopted what McDougall described as a ‘rod and line’ approach to staffing, rather than the ‘dragnet’ employed by the new United Nations Organisation (UN), which by late 1946 had almost 3000 staff, treble that of the League of Nations. FAO, in contrast, had 160 by then, of an expected total of six hundred. For some time they occupied the premises of the Interim Commission, gradually spreading to several other buildings in Washington. FAO’s permanent site was expected to be close to UN Headquarters somewhere in the United States.

**World Food Crisis**

In February 1946 the nucleus organisation faced a crisis. Crops had failed in Europe and in Asia; US production was not increasing to meet the need; machinery, fertilisers and transport were inadequate and world population was rising rapidly. The UN General Assembly, meeting in London, called for immediate action to meet a worldwide shortage of food. Orr responded by offering to take responsibility ‘for mobilizing world resources’, beginning with a conference on ‘Urgent Food Problems’ in May. McDougall set out six activities needed for effective action. Three fell within FAO’s constitutional ambit: continuous review and assessment of trends; calculation of the amount of basic foods needed by all countries; and agricultural rehabilitation of war-devastated and underdeveloped countries. Constitutional amendments would be needed to allow the remaining three: allocation of supplies on an equitable basis; centralised purchasing to prevent inflationary purchasing and as a reserve; and funding or credit arrangements to allow relief on a business,
rather than a charitable, basis. McDougall thought these should be given to ‘an executive body’, established under the general supervision of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), which should itself include representatives of relevant agencies.72

There were other multinational bodies with responsibility for food supply. The Combined Food Board (CFB) run by the United States, Britain and Canada allocated supplies during the war through a series of commodity committees, but was due to be dissolved in June 1946. The UN Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) and the Food Committee of the Emergency Economic Committee for Europe dealt with the aftermath of war and were expected to be short-lived.

In his invitation to the May conference, Orr predicted a need for ‘international action on an agreed plan’ for four or five years.73 He feared supply would be slow to return to normal, and that the bogey of unmarketable surplus would hinder efforts to increase production. Means must be found to enable the functions of the temporary organisations to continue while needed. The Conference on Urgent Food Problems agreed that the CFB should remain until December, and an International Emergency Food Council (IEFC)—established, staffed and financed by FAO—should then have power to recommend production increases and direct supplies to areas of most need.

This seemed to solve the problem posed by FAO’s ambiguous constitution. But economist J. B. Brigden, then Financial Counsellor at the Australian Legation in Washington, had misgivings. The IEFC was more cumbersome than the CFB and was unlikely to prove any better; a failure would reflect on FAO: ‘those nationals who are concerned for the welfare of FAO have been trying…to protect it against such risks, but FAO has chosen to take them.’74 Brigden also criticised the conference itself. Preparation had been ‘negligible’ and the conference had to be saved by other organisations. ‘I do not expect the FAO Secretariat to cope with all the ambitious objectives which Sir John Orr and our Mr McDougall feel to be within their scope.’ Difficulties and the slow pace of recruitment were understandable, but ‘FAO is too apt to undertake work which it cannot do’. There had been sufficient goodwill to excuse its failure to foresee the difficulties, but its principals had ‘no very clear ideas about the limits of their functions’. He added that FAO was ‘only one of a large number of international bodies now trying to get their bearings’, and he hoped that the UN Assembly, through ECOSOC, ‘would be able to sort out the appropriate functions for each…[but]

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72 FAO, 3.1, C1, note for Director-General, ‘The World Food Policy’, 13 May 1946.
73 NAA, A1067, ER46/4/14, Text of invitation, 3 May 1946.
the task of the co-ordinating body is extremely onerous’. The IEFC remained in being for some three years, allocating exportable surpluses according to need; Orr for one believed that it had saved millions of lives.

### The World Food Board

Encouraged by its establishment of the IEFC, FAO sought to gain the executive powers it lacked for a long-term attack on hunger. Its own figures suggested a rate of population increase in the following 20 years requiring a doubling of world food production. This information was circulated to member governments along with an invitation to a conference in Copenhagen in September 1946 to consider a plan for a World Food Board (WFB). The board would provide long-term credit to food-deficient countries to enable purchases of food and industrial products to modernise their own agriculture. It would have authority to buy and hold stocks of surplus food from exporters, for distribution in time of need and also to help stabilise prices, thereby encouraging greater production in advanced countries. All this would increase world trade and, as Orr later put it, ‘be an important step to the evolution of the United Nations Organisation as a World Government without which there is little hope of permanent world peace’.

The plan alarmed the United States and Britain. The United States disapproved in principle of proposals ‘inimical’ to US international trade policy. Will Clayton, US Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, tried to persuade Orr to withdraw it, arguing that the regime of the International Trade Organization (ITO), whose charter and powers were then under discussion at a series of multilateral meetings, would foster an increase in trade, in line with the Department of State’s longstanding policy. Orr refused: the ITO would regard trade as an end in itself; food was vital and demanded special treatment. While the Department of Agriculture saw the plan more favourably—it was perhaps an ‘ever-normal granary’ on an international scale—the department no longer influenced policy and the US delegate, Norris E. Dodd, was instructed to acknowledge the problem and to propose that a committee report on an alternative.

The British Government had ‘serious doubts’. The plan was costly and likely to increase import prices, worsening Britain’s budget difficulties. As in Washington,
the Ministry of Agriculture found some merit in proposals to stabilise prices, but failed to persuade Cabinet.81 There was a danger that the programs of FAO would overlap functions of the ITO; the British delegate would be instructed that solutions to the problem of world food supply went beyond the scope of FAO and should be dealt with by ECOSOC. The problem was serious: Britain had been mobilising imperial resources, holding a conference in Singapore earlier in the year and urging Commonwealth producers like Australia to increase production and withhold domestic consumption. But Britain would support the US proposal to seek alternatives to Orr’s plan at Copenhagen.82

Australian economic advisers differed in their views on the WFB proposals. Coombs generally favoured its formation. He hoped it would speed up international negotiations on commodity arrangements, which were important to Australia, but acknowledged that the plan presented ‘the most contentious and complex problems that FAO has undertaken to solve’. He identified an unstated assumption underlying the plan, that ‘western civilization must demonstrate to the world...its capacity for organising in the interests of world needs. Failure is to invite political and economic policies which may be distasteful to some of the Powers.’ J. G. Crawford was a member of FAO’s independent Standing Committee on Economics and Marketing, which had endorsed the WFB aims of raising productivity in agriculture, increasing food consumption of malnourished peoples and eliminating large price fluctuations in agricultural products. Crawford acknowledged the relevance of the plan to Australian policy, but worried that possible contributions of foodstuffs from ‘exporting countries outside commercial markets must be small in relation to the total problem’, with a danger that disillusion would follow. He also warned that a suggestion of special prices to meet crisis situations ‘raised important issues likely to prove thorny in Washington’. Both Crawford and Coombs approved of the idea that raising health and nutrition standards involved economic policies ‘designed to promote higher levels of income and employment, which effectively means industrialization’, neatly fitting the Australian positive approach.83 But Australian views counted for little when delegates met in Copenhagen in September. All ‘appeared’ to support the WFB, but insisted on considering alternatives, preferably in collaboration with other organisations such as ECOSOC and the preparatory commission for the ITO.84

81 Staples, Birth of Development, p. 89.
82 NAA, A1067, ER46/4/16, Cable D786, 21 August 1946.
84 Ibid., A1067, ER46/4/16, Bulcock to Dept of Commerce, 5287, 9 September 1946.
The WFB Preparatory Commission

A committee duly recommended formation of a WFB Preparatory Commission to consider Orr’s proposal ‘and any other relevant proposals’.85 Australia’s delegate to the commission, F. W. Bulcock, warned that in the final analysis the work would be ‘largely political’.86 The task of guiding that work fell to Bruce. As High Commissioner, he had been unable to participate firsthand in the events leading to the formation of FAO. When his London appointment ended in October 1945, he returned to Australia for the southern summer. He may have considered resuming an active part in Australian conservative politics; certainly he was not prepared to predict when he would return to London, and his refusal of a peerage offered in 1945 may have been to allow for that possibility. No such opportunity was presented to him, however, and he was back in London by mid 1946. In 1945 Bruce had probably expected to be offered a significant international appointment, perhaps heading ECOSOC, but now such hopes were fading. Perhaps he was considered too old. He had been in the forefront of Australian, imperial and international politics for nearly three decades; it could well have seemed that he was older than his sixty-three years. Considering possible candidates for UN Secretary-General, Adlai Stevenson and Gladwyn Jebb suggested ‘an Australian as good as Bruce but twenty years younger’. Bruce was therefore available to continue his work for social justice as Chair of the Preparatory Commission. Following Bruce’s appointment, Attlee again offered him a peerage, arguing that it would strengthen his hand in any international post. This time, Bruce accepted. As Lord Bruce of Melbourne, he was to make good use of the House of Lords as a forum for advocating his international goals.87

The announcement of Bruce’s appointment to the commission referred to his work in 1935 and on other League of Nations inquiries. Now, in a context of new consensus on the need for expansion of consumption, the three architects of the nutrition initiative were working together in an organisation which they hoped would bring that vision into being. Orr’s proposals, argued Bruce, did not exceed the primary tasks of FAO, nor did they mean a new superstructure. They simply showed the ‘necessity of greater co-operation between existing bodies’ and possible creation of ‘some parallel bodies in the future’. Optimism was nevertheless tempered by Bruce’s political sense. He feared that it might be impossible to realise proposals for stabilisation and made rough notes of answers to the argument that a drive for greater production would lead to surplus,

87 Cumpston, Lord Bruce, pp. 246, 249.
thereby renewing the swings from falling prices to reduced production, then to rising prices and surplus again. He concluded it would be safer not to give stabilisation too much prominence: prevention of starvation in times of famine should be at the forefront of arguments in favour of Orr’s plan.88

Figure 19 Lord Bruce and F. L. McDougall at FAO.

Source: E. McDougall.

After five weeks’ work, Bruce stated that his commission was examining three proposals to meet the food crisis: British and American suggestions for programs centred on individual commodities, and Orr’s WFB. The commission had been ‘struck most forcibly’ by the need for ‘a co-ordinating authority with respect to all commodity agreements’.89 He worked hard himself, chairing committees on Development and Food Programs and on Price Stabilization and Commodity Policy, as well as chairing some working groups, because ‘he found himself so intensely interested in the subject and desired to get a grasp of all its aspects’.90 In his statement to the commission’s final plenary session, Bruce drew a parallel between the world in 1920 and the world in 1947. He predicted that lack of

89 Ibid., Address to 60th Annual Meeting of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, 17 December 1946. Text of full WFB proposals is in NAA, M104, 14(2).
90 FAO, 3.1, A3, McDougall to Philip Noel-Baker, 18 December 1946.
sufficient purchasing power to absorb the output of increased production capacity resulting from war would mean mass unemployment, economic uncertainty and social unrest. Achievement of that purchasing power required international goodwill and cooperation. His commission recommended an annual review to ensure that national agricultural programs would fit into a global food production plan, and a review of national programs; these measures could create in FAO ‘a world parliament of food’. The commission also called for development of industry and of the latent resources of less-developed countries, and it urged cooperation with other specialised agencies. Bruce spoke in similar vein a few months later in his maiden speech in the House of Lords: ‘Almost every thinking person is now in favour of expansion of production and consumption.’ 91 It was a far cry from the nuts and bolts of Orr’s WFB.

Bruce had made the best of an impossible situation. He was not, argues David Lee, ‘compromising his internationalist principles but rather using his skills as a facilitator to salvage as much as he could of the original plan’. 92 The WFB proposals could not withstand the concerted opposition of the two most influential members of FAO. Orr stuck to his ideals and left FAO a disappointed man in 1948. In the following year, he was created Baron Boyd Orr, made a commander of the Légion d’Honneur and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Like Bruce, he used the House of Lords to continue his campaign to feed the hungry.

Orr’s ‘world view, grounded in science and internationalism’, had lost to US and British national security policies ‘based on alliances, atomic weapons, unilateral international action, large peacetime militaries and a system of managed trade’. But it has been argued that the ‘counterhegemonic force’, which FAO with its broad membership represented, could not be ignored entirely, and that it was able to ‘focus global attention on some of the shortcomings of the emerging world system’. 93 The Cold War could not quite extinguish the flame lit in Geneva in 1935.

**FAO after Orr**

FAO did change. Its supreme policymaking body was, and remains, its conference, reduced from an annual to a biennial event after the organisation moved to Rome in 1951. In its first years, the organisation was directed between conferences by an independent executive, but in 1948 the conference bowed to pressure and accepted that the World Food Council (WFC), the toothless organisation

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91 NAA, M104, 14(1), statement by Bruce at Final Plenary Session, 24 January; summary of speech on WFB Proposals, House of Lords, 13 May 1947.
created instead of the WFB, should also replace the executive. Membership of the council was elected on a national basis, each member country having a power of veto, though its chairman remained independent. Bruce served as its first chairman, from 1947 to 1951. He admitted the WFC lacked power, but argued that it possessed ‘powerful moral sanctions’: FAO’s independent experts would ‘confront the world as well as the governments with facts. Governments can’t evade these things any more than they can evade the measures to meet these facts.’

But the independent experts were now subjected to a further layer of national control.

**Figure 20 F. L. McDougall and John Boyd Orr.**

Source: E. McDougall.

As FAO moved to take over the functions of the relief organisation IEFC, reports were dire. The Indian harvest had deteriorated and the rice supply was precarious. Europe was 9 million tons short of the ‘semi-starvation rations’ of grain distributed in the previous winter; the maize crop had failed and drought had deprived European farmers of fodder. The WFC considered a need for legislative powers. ‘We can’t invent food which doesn’t exist but what we can do is to see that the supplies which are available are fairly distributed.’ Bruce’s long-term aims—never fully realised—remained the maximising of food production by ensuring fair prices all round, and storage of famine reserves.

FAO itself was attracting criticism. Crawford wrote that ‘FAO badly needs some leadership…Orr has launched FAO and his task is done. McDougall is a good ideas man but no administrator.’ The organisation lacked a good administrator

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94 Ibid., p. 94; NAA, M104, 14(1), Bruce in interview with Richie Calder, 19 September 1947.
95 Ibid.
96 NAA, M444 [307], Crawford to Coombs, 2 August 1947.
at the top, and coordination between its divisions was inadequate. ‘If the new DG is not a capable administrator, he must secure a deputy who is.’

Perhaps Orr and McDougall recognised their own failings in this regard. After the 1947 conference, Orr decided to appoint ‘one first-class Deputy Director-General’, with McDougall designated ‘Counselor’ at the same level. In this scheme, the Director-General would deal with member governments and large policy questions and attempt to bring together all the specialised agencies to collaborate effectively under ECOSOC. His deputy would be responsible for machinery, personnel and administration, while McDougall would provide advice on policy and relations with international organisations.

Orr undertook to remain at FAO until a successor could be found. The search again proved difficult. There were many jobs for able candidates in the growing international community and such candidates could not easily be spared by nations recovering from war. Many suggestions were made and many feelers put out. McDougall thought Coombs would be excellent, but Coombs recognised his own lack of appropriate expertise and preferred to remain in Australia. Lester Pearson chose Ottawa, and recommended Bruce.

Bruce sounded out Casey, who also declined. McDougall did not favour his fellow Special Adviser, Louwes, and was himself thought to be unacceptable to the British and Americans, who might have been prepared to accept Bruce; both would prefer someone younger. Apparently there were no suitable young candidates. At US instigation, a special session of the Conference in April 1948 appointed Norris E. Dodd, then US Under Secretary of Agriculture, with a long background in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Dodd, aged sixty-eight, was almost four years older than Bruce, and was to occupy the position until early 1954. W. Noble Clark was seconded from the University of Wisconsin to the position of Deputy Director-General for the first half of 1948, bridging the gap between Orr’s departure in April and the arrival of the new Director-General in June. Dodd’s deputy was Sir Herbert Broadley, a widely experienced British civil servant who had been Secretary to the IEC for its first two years. Broadley remained at FAO until mid 1958.

Dodd instituted a change of direction, welcomed by the great powers, but disappointing at least some of the staff. One of those disappointed was Howard Tolley, a former head of the US Bureau of Agricultural Economics, who was FAO’s Director of Economics and Marketing and Vice-Chairman of FAO’s Executive Committee. Tolley respected Dodd as an able administrator, but later recalled

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97 Ibid., A1068, ER47/4/6, Crawford to Bulcock, 14 August 1947.
99 NAA, M448 [307], McDougall to Coombs, 15 July; Coombs to Crawford, 26 August 1947.
103 FAO, 3.1, A3, McDougall to Bruce, 1 October 1946.
that old enmities within the Department of Agriculture resurfaced at FAO. Some staff, including Tolley, were not retained, others were sidelined while yet others abandoned idealism to become ‘petty bureaucrats’. Even ‘McDougall with all of his zeal, is hanging on today…though he has been shunted clear aside and isn’t in position to make any significant contribution whatever’.

There is no evidence that McDougall felt this way. His position, as determined by Orr, remained unchanged until 1955 when he was forced by ill health to retire, and became a part-time ‘consultant’. Until then he continued a busy schedule of travel between the United States and Europe, attending meetings of ECOSOC and other bodies under the UN umbrella. By the time FAO moved to Rome in 1951, the postwar food emergency had passed and the Marshall Plan had been implemented in Europe. The focus of FAO’s work under Dodd moved to technical assistance to farmers in the undeveloped world, statistical intelligence and ‘limited proposals’ for disposal of surpluses. The organisation, constrained by a tight budget of $5 million per annum, concentrated on ‘small practical steps toward increased agricultural production and freedom from hunger’. Dodd was creating ‘an international department of agriculture, overseeing a global agricultural revolution comparable to that in the United States overseen by the US Department of Agriculture’. This was not Orr’s grand plan, but it accorded with much of McDougall’s thinking. His views on the importance of technical assistance and statistical services, formed long ago in Renmark, persisted. During 1947, before Orr’s departure, McDougall had argued that problems of development and of improving the economic and social status of rural populations were ‘peculiarly ours’, even more than those of food supply and insurance against surplus; they were also important in providing markets for the developed world, as he explained in ‘The Challenge to Western Civilization’.

‘The Challenge to Western Civilization’

McDougall’s last significant memorandum, with the above title, written in March 1947, makes an argument similar to those he had made in the late 1930s, but with a Cold War perspective. ‘The faith of the world in Western democracy has been shaken’ by the economic failures and restrictions of the 1930s. The West has emerged victorious from the war, but with diminished prestige. A ‘rival system [is] challenging our whole concept of a civilization based upon the liberty of the individual’. The ‘basic dilemma’ is that since 1918 the Western economy works at full capacity only in war: ‘the economic problem
of the peace is to find a constructive alternative to the total-war economy of organized waste.’ Populations suffering poverty, malnutrition and reduced life expectancy must be convinced that the system of Western democracy is able and willing to help them improve their standards of living. Urgent development must extend beyond improvements in agriculture to industry, transport and education, and must be undertaken by international action. ‘International sponsorship’ of development is essential. Countries with growing national consciousness are reluctant to depend upon ‘any one great nation, since this causes fears of economic domination’. With modern communications, ‘poverty-stricken countries know more than ever before about how the well-to-do live… Misery has never been the basis of a stable civilization, but, because it has become so much more conscious, its danger has been increased a hundredfold.’ Added to the political argument is an economic one, an international version of McDougall’s complementary sheltered markets theory: underdeveloped countries need goods of every description; developed economies need markets.

McDougall was disappointed that the WFB Preparatory Commission had given insufficient emphasis to ‘the enormous importance of the development aspects’. He wanted FAO to bridge the hiatus between a developing country’s receipt of technical advice and the securing of a major loan from the IBRD by providing small funds to enable preliminary surveys and other preparatory work, but he found that major countries could not accept that such funds were needed. He also wanted coordinated attacks on problems of food, agriculture, transport, health and education. In particular, he stressed the importance of developing industry, disputing a view that it should be the responsibility of the ITO, since that organisation was likely to be largely concerned with trade and ‘traders are the very worst people in the world for the development of industrialisation that competes…with existing interests’.107

Throughout the memorandum there is a tone of urgency. Western civilisation itself ‘depends on how far in the next five to the outside ten years we succeed in convincing the underdeveloped countries that they can obtain the help and assistance they require from countries with our type of institutions’.108 That sense of urgency was fuelled by the growing political divide. On 12 March 1947, US President Harry S. Truman enunciated his ‘Truman Doctrine’, signalling the Cold War strategy of containment of Communism. The opportunity for full international cooperation had passed. With some prescience, McDougall wrote that ‘in the political battle the development of backward countries will play an increasingly important part’. He went on to suggest development of ‘new centres of economic power’, which could counteract the division of the world

into opposing blocs.\textsuperscript{109} He urged a joint effort from FAO, the IBRD and perhaps the United States in development projects. FAO could provide the technical backing that the bank would need. A development drive might be based on ‘individually small but practical projects spread over many underdeveloped countries’. Such a scheme could provide ‘a focus for replanning FAO’s work as a whole’.\textsuperscript{110} Here McDougall seems to have been charting the course to be taken by FAO under Dodd’s leadership.

**Cooperation with International Agencies**

‘The one thing which these [international] organisations cannot do is to “ensure”.’\textsuperscript{111} This statement was particularly true of FAO, limited by its small budget and constitution, and by the influence of the dominant powers. For all the new bodies, demarcation of responsibilities and cooperation with other organisations involved tedious and complicated negotiations over legal minutiae, as well as political savvy and influence. It was probably McDougall’s most time-consuming task in the post–Orr era, and it was one for which his aptitude and tolerance had been demonstrated in previous decades. Each agency negotiated, clause by clause, a formal agreement with the United Nations itself, but practical problems of cooperation remained. A belief persisted that specialised agencies were subject to problems of overlapping, a view disputed by McDougall, who declared that all were ‘so conscious of the limitations of finance and personnel as to be strictly on guard against duplication’. Outsiders might confuse common fields of interest with common work programs. In rural welfare, for example, there were too few people actually at work and there was ‘closest consultation in regard to program preparation’.\textsuperscript{112} FAO was happy to see most of the work in many fields undertaken by others, and should concentrate on welfare matters within its own province: nutrition, soil conservation and agricultural extension. But there must be consultation: ‘I cannot too strongly emphasise that…some preliminary discussion should occur with the Specialised Agencies concerned before…even an informal commitment’, he wrote after the United Nations had organised missions by the specialised agencies to Latin America in which FAO could not afford to participate without extra funding.\textsuperscript{113}

A contentious question for FAO in the early years was that of population. McDougall used the old phrase ‘intolerable pessimism’ for a view that sufficient food could not be produced unless population growth was limited. He objected

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} CSIR, 379, 22/16, McDougall to Clunies Ross, 31 March 1947.
\item \textsuperscript{110} FAO, 3.1, Cl, ‘Note for Director General’, 14 November 1947.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 3.1, B3, Leroy D. Stinebower, State Department, to McDougall, 21 June 1948.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 3.1, A2, McDougall to Alger Hiss, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 June 1948.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 3.1, A2, McDougall to Mrs Alva Myrdal, UN Department of Social Affairs, 15 November 1949.
\end{itemize}
to a proposed UNESCO publication including views of this nature: FAO should have been consulted first; an underlying assumption about the amount of land required was wrong; and ‘concentration of attention upon population control would be dangerous and highly unsuitable for an international organization’. And he argued vigorously to ensure that FAO was involved in IBRD consideration of questions relating to food and development. He could not entirely withstand a more general sense of pessimism: ‘the deterioration of the political situation [Communists had just seized power in Czechoslovakia, and tensions were mounting over Berlin] is proceeding with quite horrible rapidity and it is difficult to get forebodings out of one’s mind. Can mankind find a sufficiently intelligent way of avoiding his own destruction?’ But about FAO his optimism prevailed. He noted, after FAO’s move to Rome, that while there was still less food per capita than in prewar years, there was greater knowledge about ways to increase productivity. Small things, such as a change from sickles to scythes in Afghanistan, and vaccination of cattle against rinderpest, could achieve much. The most urgent task of all international social and economic problems, perhaps, was to teach farm families, who represented half the world’s population. That action could be taken immediately and could achieve ‘spectacular results’.

Figure 21 F. L. McDougall, Counselor, FAO.

Source: E. McDougall.

114 Ibid., 3.1, A6, McDougall to Dodd, 10 and 18 November 1948.
115 Ibid., 3.1, A1, McDougall to Alan Ritchie, 12 March 1948.
116 Ibid., 3.1, A4, draft article for Pax et Libertas, journal of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 22 November 1951.