

"A lot of the things we did were quite radical. We called for a very radical restructuring of the International Law Commission. We felt quite strongly that ECOSOC had become obsolete. One of the problems of the UN system is that it is virtually impossible, once an institution is created—no matter how small, no matter how overtaken by events—it is virtually impossible to get rid of it. Now, we would have been quite happy to settle for a radical restructuring of ECOSOC and [to] give it a different role; but the way to get people to think about ECOSOC is to say, 'Look, this thing was created in 1945 to do something [that] has long since been overtaken by events, and it is now an obsolete and extremely expensive institution. Start from the assumption that, unless we can find something else for it to do that would justify the expense, we ought to get rid of it.'

"ECOSOC to me is like a fourth reading in Parliament. The history of the UN has been towards specialization and, when that works, that's the right way to go. You have, say, the Human Rights Commission and then agencies that are quite jealous of their specialized content, and they are mostly in the social and economic and cultural field[s]. Those have become increasingly specialized. The diplomats who serve in the capacity of national representatives on the councils of those agencies are almost certain[ly] the same people who are representing those countries in ECOSOC and then represent[ing] them again in the General Assembly in the committees that receive the reports from ECOSOC.

"So what you have is a group of specialized civil servants—some of them very good, some of them not so good—doing their thing within the context of the specialized commission or agency or unit; and they then report to the diplomats who supervise their work on their council. The same people show up again four months later, read the report that is made by the specialized group in the context of ECOSOC, debate the report that they have already debated once as members of the Human Rights Commission or whatever. They then go ahead and approve the report that they approved in the first place when they were meeting as the Human Rights Commission, [and] send it along to the appropriate committee of the General Assembly, which then debates it again with the same people.

"There are lots of unexceptionable reasons why they don't act unanimously to end this redundancy. Not every country is represented on ECOSOC; they are elected by the larger body, the General Assembly, and it is considered a very nice thing to be elected to ECOSOC. It is a kind of popularity contest; it is also a funnel through which things pass on their way from the specialized unit to the most generalized unit, the General Assembly. And since only about half the members of the General Assembly are on ECOSOC, it means that the half that are on ECOSOC get to have twice as much time to speak, and get to be twice as influential in voting something up or down. Now, since ECOSOC is constituted exactly on the same proportions in regional strengths as the General Assembly, the results are bound to be the same. But still, it's very difficult to get the half of the countries of the UN that are on ECOSOC to vote themselves out of business; and the half that are not on ECOSOC see themselves as being on ECOSOC next year. It means that you