I. The present powers of the UN and their limitations

The best guarantee for peace is a strong international organization with powers of binding decisions and of military enforcement against aggression. If we survive, we will probably have that one day.

The United Nations is a beginning. Under the Charter the Security Council has both the said powers and can exercise them by a qualified majority vote (nine out of its fifteen members). But the power of the veto which the Charter confers upon the then five big powers has in many cases prevented the Council from utilizing its powers. And the provisions on military action in articles 42 ff. of the Charter have never been implemented or used – because of the veto.

The General Assembly may make decisions by a simple or two thirds majority – and there is no power of veto. But the General Assembly can only make non-binding recommendations to the member states.

How can we get states to agree to abandon these limitations? More specifically: How can we get the big powers to accept a power of binding decisions without veto?

II. Weighted voting

The first condition for a strong international organization is a more realistic voting system.

The present system in the UN and most other international organizations is “one nation one vote”, which implies that a state of 100,000 inhabitants has the same voting weight as a state of 1,000,000,000 inhabitants. This may be acceptable for recommendations, which states can ignore and which they unfortunately frequently do ignore. But for binding decisions the big powers will not accept to be outvoted by a two-thirds majority of small states, as has happened several times. The veto power is a very arbitrary means of avoiding this: Any one of the five big powers which took part in the founding of the UN has an absolute right of preventing a binding decision, whereas all the other big states have no stronger voting power than very small states.

The solution must be found in a system of weighted voting, where each state is accorded a voting power according to its population, its contribution to the budget of the Organization and/or to other relevant criteria. There should be neither “one state one vote”, nor voting strength in proportionality to population or other criteria – but a compromise between the two: More voting strength for the big powers, but not veto for any one.

We already have that system in some organizations which have the power of making bindings decisions:

Thus in two specialized agencies of the United Nations – the International

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Bank and the International Monetary Fund – each member has 250 votes plus an additional number of votes proportional to its paid-in quota of the capital stock (with some further adjustments in the case of the Fund) – see article XII, section 5 of the constitution of the Fund and article V section 3 of the constitution of the Bank. This gives, in the Bank, the United States 19.29%, the Nordic countries 3.48% and Bhutan 0.03%.

In international organizations which provide satellites for international telecommunications – such as INTELSAT, INMARSAT, and EUTELSAT – the members vote in substantive matters in proportion to their capital investment shares in the Organization, which in turn are adjusted regularly in proportion to their utilization of the system (see f.ex. INMARSAT Convention of 3 September 1976 art. 14 and the Operating Agreement of the same date art. V, which provide in principle for an upward limit of 25% for any one member). Art. IX (j)(i) of the INTELSAT Constitution of 20 August 1971 provides that substantive decisions of the Board of Governors shall be taken either by at least four “governors” (i.e. national representatives) having at least two thirds of the total voting participation (based on investment shares) – or by all members of the Board minus three, regardless of the voting participation they represent.

As another example may be mentioned the numerous international commodity agreements. Thus the constitution of the Cocoa Producers Alliance of 24 March 1970 provides in art. 8(1) that 200 out of the 1000 votes shall be equally distributed among the member states and that the remaining 800 votes shall be distributed in proportion to “the highest annual production of cocoa by each member” during the six preceding years.

In the Council of the European Communities those decisions which require a qualified majority are taken by weighted voting according to an arbitrary scale. Thus art. 148 of the EEC Treaty allocates 10 votes to the big countries and from 2 to 8 to the others.

In most of these cases the decisions taken by weighted voting do not involve the exercise of powers over or within the member states, but merely exercise of powers over the important sums contributed by member states to the capital and the budget of the Organization. However, in the European Communities the provisions on weighted voting were a necessary tool in order to make the bigger countries agree to conferring upon the Community the power to make decisions binding upon and within the several member states.

If a system of weighted voting were introduced in the Security Council, it might be possible to mitigate or eliminate the veto power for certain members, which in turn would enable the Security Council to make more use of the powers of binding decision that it has under the Charter. If introduced in the General Assembly or in other international organizations, a system of weighted voting might enable the big powers to agree to according to that organ or those organizations a power of making decisions binding upon its member states.

The next question is then what such powers could and should be conferred upon the UN or specialized international organizations. While the final aim should be a world federal government, one must obviously start realistically in rather limited fields, where the need and the possibilities are greatest. These