

War Criminals

The Assembly added to its agenda and referred to the First Committee a proposal by the Byelorussian delegation concerning the extradition of war criminals. By this proposal, which was adopted with slight amendments, the General Assembly, "believing that war criminals continue to evade justice in the territories of certain States," urges both members of the United Nations and non-member States to arrest such persons and to send them back "to the countries in which their abominable deeds were done."

Languages

Conscious of the difficulties of arriving at an agreed solution of the language problem in the United Nations, the New Zealand delegation, in the meetings of the Preparatory Commission, had objected to the procedure which was then proposed of formulating separate language rules for the General Assembly and the Security Council. It asked for a single discussion with a view to establishing a standard United Nations practice. In due course, and after prolonged debate both by the Steering Committee of the Preparatory Commission and later by a sub-committee of the First Committee, a set of language rules was formulated and later unanimously adopted by the Assembly.

The core of the problem consists in the great practical disadvantages which would result from any increase in the number of the languages *into which* the proceedings of United Nations meetings are to be rendered. At the San Francisco Conference, as in the League of Nations, these languages were two, English and French. Delegates who spoke other important languages, and especially Spanish—which is the language of some two-fifths of all the members of the United Nations—showed an understandable reluctance to accept a less privileged position for their own language.

Even greater, however, was the reluctance of all delegates to increase by 50 per cent. the already considerable tedium of hearing everything said twice over; and as there was no willingness to replace either English or French by another language, these two were confirmed in their position under the name of "working languages." At the same time five languages were chosen as "official languages"—Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish. This means that a delegate may speak in any one of these five languages with the knowledge that his speech will be translated by a United Nations interpreter into the two working languages (but no other). A delegate speaking in any other language than one of the five must himself provide for the interpretation of his speech into English or French. Documents also are to be reproduced, in principle, into the five official languages.

By this compromise the United Nations has adopted a more liberal and politically wise language system than the League of Nations, which did little to facilitate the use of languages other than English and French. It is also, necessarily, a more costly system. The possibilities of simultaneous telephonic interpretation similar to that used at the Nuremberg trials are also to be examined.