

Multinational Business Enterprises

A New Category of International Organizations (*)

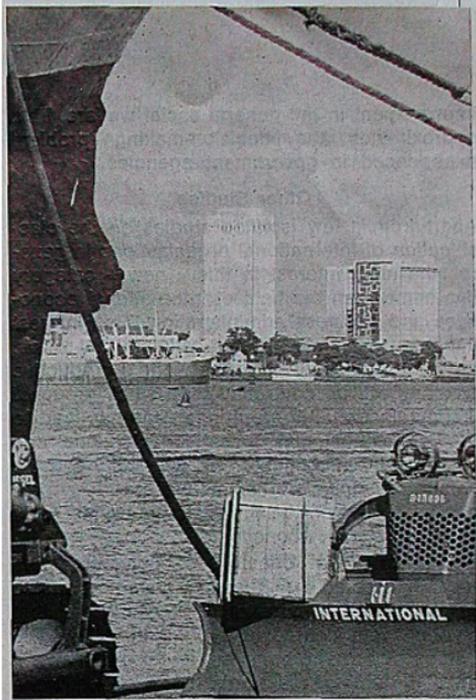
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Introduction

The Union of International Associations has, prior to the new edition of its Yearbook of International Organizations, restricted its attention to non-profit international organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental. Nearly all intergovernmental organizations are non-profit but the few exceptions have been included in previous editions of the Yearbook to ensure that all intergovernmental organizations were listed. These include such bodies as Eurochemic and Eurofimà.

There are many non-governmental organizations which, although they do not have profit as the main aim, nevertheless operate in order to facilitate profit maximization by their members. Most of these are in the commercial section of the Yearbook classified list. The distinction between governmental and non-governmental organizations as defined by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, does not differentiate between profit and non-profit international non-governmental organizations. In practice however the non-governmental organizations accepted into consultative status with the United Nations have all been non-profit organizations. Since the 1966-1967 edition of the Yearbook and particularly during the first six months of 1968, there has been considerable interest in « multinational » or « transnational » business enterprises and corporations. Articles dealing with the characteristics and business policies of world enterprises have however been appearing in the Harvard Business Review and other

(*) A detailed report, including the survey data on which this article is based, appears as a special section of the 12th and latest edition of the Yearbook of International Organizations (1968-1969). The report includes a list of 600 multinational business enterprises.



(Photo: Port of Lagos World Bank)

American publications since the beginning of the 1960s. Studies of the definition and classification of international organizations have stressed the need to include as a separate category the largely ignored group of international profit-making organizations. These would then constitute a third major group of organizations on the international scene, together with international governmental and non-governmental, non-profit organizations. It must be pointed out that the decision to add profit-making organizations to the list of international organizations in this Yearbook implied a fundamental assumption which has in fact been borne out by research in the United States on organizations in general, namely that corporations and corporate structures bear many if not most of the characteristics of any or all other kinds of organizations. In addition it has been argued that as corporations recognize the effects of their policies on the well-being of society, which is important for their survival, their decisions are governed less by straightforward profit maximization and more by objectives which combine long-term profits with

improvement in the general social welfare. This approximates the decision-making problem experienced in government agencies.

Other Studies

Apart from a few isolated studies on the classification of international organizations in general, the main interest in this « new » category has come from the field of international economics and business administration. This interest has been stimulated by the estimate that within the next decade 75 % of the world's productive capacity will be controlled by a small group of 300 multinational corporations. This has led to the suggestion that these organizations can become an instrument of great utility for the general progress of human welfare — a progress founded on the profit motive as the basis of a free market economy. The International Chamber of Commerce has recently created a « Special Committee on the Transnational Corporation » of which the first meeting was held on March 16th, 1968. The purpose of the Committee is to undertake a study in depth of the increasing influence of the multinational corporation and to establish recommendations for governments and business circles. It is hoped in this way to aid the multinational corporation, of whatever country of origin, to fulfil its role in the economic development of countries in which it is active. The Committee will formulate its conclusions on the basis of a report by American economist, Dr Sidney Rolfe. A comprehensive study of the importance of the multinational corporation has been in progress at the Harvard Graduate School of Business for some years under Professor Raymond Vernon. The study is specifically concerned with manufacturing organizations listed in « The 500 Largest U.S. Industrial Corporations » (« Fortune », 1964 and 1965) with manufacturing subsidiaries in 6 foreign countries.

Lack of Information

The published studies have not yet produced criteria which could be used to evaluate any business enterprise in order to establish a list of multinational corporations. Criteria have been discussed but only isolated examples of organizations fulfilling them have been cited. There has been a tendency to restrict attention to very large multinational manufacturing organizations because of their considerable economic impor-

tance. Little attention has been given to economically less important profit organizations which might in fact be more « international », whether they are industrial commercial or service enterprises. There are, for example, international accounting, engineering, advertising and employment firms.

The UAI after consultation with the International Chamber of Commerce, has undertaken to explore another aspect of this question. The UAI is primarily interested in making available as soon as possible details on all multinational corporations as international bodies, in the same way as is done for intergovernmental and international non-profit non-governmental organizations. In order to do this, criteria of « multinationality » have to be developed which are sufficiently general to be applied to all types and sizes of profit corporation. As an aid to the general debate on this « new » category of organizations and to test a few available criteria, it was decided to include in the 12th edition of the Yearbook a preliminary list of possible candidates for consideration as multinational corporations.

Definition of « Multinational »

There is a graduation from organizations undertaking international trade to international business enterprises. A summary of the methods by which a national manufacturing organization could operate internationally illustrates the problem of definition. A company can, according to Roy Blough, :

- solicit purchases by foreign buyers in one or more countries and ship to them in wholesale lots, leaving the further distribution of the goods to them;
- market and distribute the goods to their final users in the foreign country. In which case it may make arrangements with local distributors or establish a distribution network of its own;
- establish a factory in the country in which it is selling, or plans to sell, and produce for sale in third countries and also in the home country;
- contact foreign producers to purchase from them goods which the company distributes whether in the country of production, third countries, or the home country;
- sell its patents, technical know-how, and/or trademarks to a company in a foreign coun-

try, or license their use for a term of years in exchange for periodic royalty payments;

- undertake to supply management, at a fee, for a foreign manufacturing enterprise which it does not own or in which it has only a minority interest;
- combine any of the above methods, depending on the market with which it deals.

These operational differences are complicated by the forms which the relationship between the parent and the daughter companies can take under differing national legislations with different degrees of financial commitment on the part of the parent company. Examples are :

Branch office : a foreign local office of the parent company having no independent or corporate status.

Subsidiary : a foreign firm established under the national law of the country, whose capital stock is 50% or more controlled by the parent company.

Joint company : a foreign firm in which the parent company financial interest are equally divided.

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UNE REALITE : l'internationalisation croissante des sociétés bancaires, industrielles ou commerciales. Ce phénomène, qui n'est pas récent en lui-même, a pris une importance accrue ces dernières années en raison du nombre des succursales nationales et de la taille de plus en plus considérable des sociétés qui assurent une production internationale. Depuis que certains économistes ont prévu qu'en 1980 déjà, 75 % de la production mondiale sera contrôlée par un petit groupe de 300 sociétés transnationales, les milieux économiques et financiers ont commencé à étudier les répercussions éventuelles de ce processus.

UNE POSSIBILITE : l'internationalisation complète et réelle d'un certain nombre de sociétés à but lucratif, qui répondraient à des critères analogues à ceux appliqués aux organisations internationales non gouvernementales (dirigeants de nationalités diverses, structure internationale, etc.) à l'exception de cette absence de but lucratif, critère déjà contesté depuis quelques années par plusieurs auteurs d'ouvrages consacrés aux organisations internationales. L'étude ci-jointe de M. Anthony Judge, ainsi que le texte plus complet de son étude publiée dans la

foreign firm in which the capital interest of the participating parent company is less than 50 %;

Sub-subsidiary : a subsidiary or affiliate not (or sub-affiliate) established directly by the parent company but by another subsidiary or affiliate of the latter. This situation can be further complicated since the subsidiary can itself be in the home country or in a foreign country.

These definitions are not universally accepted. In the remainder of this note, affiliate will be used as a general term to describe all daughter and associated companies. The definition of a multinational corporation is made more difficult since there is no international corporate law. The parent and foreign daughter companies are established on equal footing in terms of the respective national legislation. From an international legal point of view a multinational corporation is merely an agglomeration of corporate entities loosely linked by a network of non-resident shareholdings, of which the majority happens to be in hands of the parent com-

12me édition du Yearbook of International Organizations, est un premier essai de définition des critères qui pourraient être requis pour considérer une société transnationale à but lucratif, comme une véritable organisation internationale.

La Chambre de Commerce Internationale a constitué un Comité de la Société Transnationale en vue d'examiner son rôle dans l'économie mondiale et comme facteur influent pour le développement des pays insuffisamment développés. Son XXIIe Congrès, qui se tiendra à Istanbul du 31 mai au 7 juin 1969, aura pour thème général : « L'Expansion économique mondiale : Rôle, droits et responsabilités de la société internationale ».

De son côté l'U.A.I., en accord avec la C.C.I., a entamé et poursuivra l'étude des critères requis pour la sélection des sociétés à but lucratif véritablement internationales et les décrira, lorsque le moment en sera venu, dans son Yearbook of International Organizations.

pany. A multinational corporation is not a legal entity. This is also true of the other group of international organizations not established by intergovernmental agreement, namely non-profit non-governmental organizations.

Other Proposed Criteria

Efforts have been made within the European Economic Community since 1960 to establish a legal basis for a European corporation. This is considered essential to permit an integration of economic strength to meet American competition. It has been suggested that the existence of European corporations would lead to the standardization of corporate legislation and become the instrument of effective long-term economic integration.

In the course of the lengthy discussions on a European corporation a number of criteria have been suggested. It has been proposed that only the larger corporations in the Common Market with a « European outlook » should be allowed to take on this new form. A counter proposal suggests that no barrier should be raised to corporations wishing to take on the new form. Another suggestion is that a minimum capital should be fixed (possibly \$ 250,000 - 500,000). To avoid these somewhat arbitrary distinctions, a further proposal attempted to define a European corporation as one with any of the following characteristics : branches in at least one country other than the parent country; financial interests in corporations in at least one country other than the parent country; financial control of at least one corporation in a country other than the parent country; quotation of shares of the corporation on stock exchanges of at least two countries.

Another set of criteria has been proposed by Jacques Maisonrouge, President of the IBM World Trade Corporation, namely : basic policies of the corporation must be applied to all its subsidiaries in order to create a worldwide image; the company must operate in a great number of countries at different stages of economic development; several of the subsidiaries must be complete industrial organizations (i.e. their activities must include research and development, manufacturing, sales and service); the subsidiaries must preferably be managed by nationals so that men of various nationalities can be trained for top jobs particularly at head-

quarters; stocks of the company should be quoted on the exchanges of the countries in which the company is active so that the capital is in effect multinational; the company must be a good citizen in every country in which it operates.

A more indirect approach has been made by Professor J. Houssiaux of the Université de Nancy. He attempted to develop criteria to describe a national corporation and from this deduced criteria for a « plurinational » corporation. The criteria are : capital spread throughout the world through the intermediary of a variety of financial markets; ability to function in any region of the globe under the direction of a team of executives of a number of nationalities, within an organization conceived independently of the management techniques of a particular economy; activities oriented in terms of the world breakdown of the factors of production, whilst taking into account the long term evolution of this breakdown, as compared with the anticipated evolution of income and demand throughout the world.

Professor Houssiaux notes three conditions as essential for the establishment and development of such enterprises. These are : unity of management policy and organization as a guide to the major decisions governing the growth of the enterprise (including : consolidated balance sheet for the entire group; reinvestment of profits from individual subsidiaries based on needs of corporation as a whole; continual modifications and extensions to group structure; organization of transfers and collective services on a global basis within the group); global conception of development and trade relations; and an environment with institutions based on internationalism.

A very practical criterion, imposed by the committee of the projected Brussels World Trade Centre, is that only those companies which can prove that at least 60 % of their turnover is derived from world trade will be permitted to rent office space in the centre. Attention so far has been concentrated on the better known types of profit corporation which are owned by private shareholders. There is however a large group of mixed government-private corporations, cooperatives, « associations », « societies », and other organizations which may not use terms in their titles which

have any connection with profit-making operations, although this represents a principal aim. The fundamental question which must be answered in order to establish criteria is which groups are to be considered as members of any such organization. Studies to date have generally assumed that an organization is multinational because it operates in a number of countries, i.e. the subsidiaries are treated as a type of member. To be consistent with the other forms of organization listed in this Yearbook, the logical requirement is that the stockholders should be considered as members. These are the persons who vote according to the rules of the organizations to elect the directors, etc., in nearly the same fashion as do the members of other international organizations. Logically it is therefore the nationality of these members which qualifies the organizations as an international one.

Possible Criteria

For the purpose of preparing a definitive list of these organization as has been done for the other two types of international organization, the Union of International Associations believes that a detailed analysis of possible multinational corporations should consider the use of all the following characteristics which measure different aspects of the concept of internationality. It may be impracticable to obtain information systematically on some of the items. It will almost certainly be necessary to consider a number of criteria together in any final definition to cover the many different types of profit organization. Possible criteria include :

1. Shareholding in parent company Ideally the shareholding should be balanced such that, for example, nationals of no country have control of more shares than nationals of two other countries combined. This ignores all the realities of the respective financial importance of different countries. A balance of voting strength has not been used as an absolute criteria in evaluating non-profit organizations for this reason. In many cases this depends on the financial contribution as in profit organizations. An additional difficulty is the impossibility of obtaining systematic data on the nationality of the shareholder. There is also the difficulty of indirect shareholdings via holding companies and investments clubs. This criterion may however be useful in certain simple cases.

2. National stock exchanges on which the shares are quoted.

A minimum could be specified for the number of foreign stock exchanges on which the shares are quoted. This is a crude approximation to the international shareholding balance. The disadvantage of this criterion is that it might exclude some corporations partially or wholly owned by governments particularly those of socialist persuasion. This criterion might however be useful in evaluating those corporations which expect to be quoted on a stock exchange.

3. Composition of Board of Directors

The national origin or current citizenship of members of the Board is of great importance to the decision-making process of an international corporation, and to the acceptability of its affiliates in host countries. In the case of non-profit organizations, the nationalities of members of the governing body are used as a guide to the significance of the stated geographical spread of membership. In the absence of precise information on the nationalities of shareholders, those of members of the Board (who are the elected representatives of the shareholders) could be considered as a first approximation. An arbitrary acceptable ratio of headquarters country voting directors to foreign country directors could be defined.

4. Composition of executive staff within companies controlled by the parent company A multinational management has been suggested as one characteristic. An ideal balance of nationalities is unrealistic but it would be possible to define some minimum acceptable ratio of headquarters country staff to foreign staff. This criterion could be used to exclude excessively ethnocentric organizations. It has the advantage that the information would not be considered confidential.

5. Balance of factories or installations (excluding sales offices and licensed producers) A multinational manufacturing enterprises should have its installations in a number of countries. Minimum criteria could be based on the total number of countries in which the company has installations, or, more stringently, on the ratio of headquarters country installations to foreign country installations. This criterion is clearly not suited to an evaluation of a trading or service company, or a highly diversified company.

6. Balance of sales of sales office (excluding representatives on commission)

A trading or service company could be evaluated on the basis of the total number of countries in which the company has offices, or, more stringently, on the ratio of headquarters country offices to foreign-country offices.

7. Continental or regional head offices
A possible convenient indication of multinationality is the existence of regional head offices. These can be considered as evidence of a decentralization of decision-making out of the headquarters-country. This criterion may be less applicable to smaller corporations.

8. Languages

A possible convenient indication of multinationality is the acceptance of a number of working languages both in dealing with customers and for internal communication between the principal head office and the regional or foreign national offices.

9. Income ratio for whole group controlled by the parent company

The ratio of income earned in the headquarters country to that earned in all other countries can be considered as one measure of the relative interest of the directors in home and foreign operations. The disadvantage of this criterion is that the information may be considered confidential. Income is often difficult to define consistently.

10. Tangible assets ratio for whole, group controlled by the parent company
The ratio of tangible assets in the headquarters country to those in all other countries can be considered as one measure of the relative interest of the directors in home and foreign operations. The disadvantage of this criterion is that information may be considered confidential. The definition of tangible assets will vary.

11. Relationship between parent group and foreign affiliates

The degree of independence in decision-making accorded to foreign affiliates by the parent company can be considered as a measure of the diminution of the influence of one national viewpoint in the conduct of the affairs of the company. This is an important concept but the effects are difficult to measure and are easily confused with a unified management policy.

12. Tax status

The tax position of the parent company and subsidiaries could be used as a criterion. Tax treaties and tax laws as applied to corporations doing international business are so very complex that this would seem to be unworkable. The information is also likely to be highly confidential. This may however become an important criterion in the future when special international legislation is created to deal with multinational corporations.

13. Relationships with non-governmental, non-profit organizations

A possible measure of « other-directedness » on the part of the corporation is membership of trade associations or any other such body for the exchange of technical or commercial information, (e.g. European Industrial Space Study Group, Inter-American Council of Commerce and Production, International Association of Food Distribution, International Copper Research Association, International Superphosphate Manufacturers' Association. This criterion may become important since such organizations will have to, make provision for membership of multinational corporations as distinct from individual national companies).

14. Relationships with intergovernmental organizations

Another possible measure of « other-directedness » on the part of the corporation is any form of consultative relationship with intergovernmental organizations (e.g. with the International Telecommunications Union, or as a partnership with the International Finance Corporation in joint ventures stimulated by the World Bank, or as membership of the General Committee of the FAO/Industry Cooperative Program or the FAO Fertilizer Industry Advisory Committee, etc.).

The greater the effort made to produce a stringent definition of internationally, the more complex measurement becomes and the fewer the number of organizations which will fulfil the resultant criteria. Existing organizations must be assumed to lie on a scale between extreme protective nationalism and a form of ideal internationalism. The position of some organizations on this scale may be governed more by the requirements of the business with which they are concerned than with any desire to be nationalistic or internationalistic. The desirable

multinational corporation characteristic of centralized control and decentralized decision-making may not be suitable in a particular trade or industry.

Detailed Results and Commentary

The only information available which could lead to a preliminary list of multinational corporations in terms of the criteria above, was the number of countries in which each company had affiliates. The sources used and the analysis of the material are described in detail in the 12th edition of the Yearbook of International Organizations.

Table 1. Number of countries (excepting the country of the parent company) in which parent companies have affiliates (i.e. subsidiaries and associates).

This table shows for the major European countries and the U.S.A. how many, for example, German parent companies have affiliates in 10 foreign countries (12 from the table).

Table 2. Number of parent companies for each major industrialized country having affiliates (i.e. subsidiaries and associates) in a given foreign country.

Whilst preparing Table 1 it was convenient to prepare Table 2. This shows for each of the major European countries and the U.S.A. how many, for example, Swedish parent companies, have affiliates in Brazil (21 from the table).

Table 3. Preliminary list of possible multinational business enterprises. Using the data in Table 1 the minimum number of countries was fixed arbitrarily at 10. This gave a preliminary list of 600 enterprises which is printed as Table 3.

This table combined a number of criteria to produce an index of « internationality » for each corporation listed.

General Comment on Criteria

A study of types of multinational corporation which has received a great deal of publicity is that of Professor Howard Perlmutter (Institut pour l'étude des méthodes de direction de l'entreprise, Lausanne). He distinguishes the following groups of corporations in what he considers to be an evolutionary chain (although every corporation is considered to have a combination of all the characteristics) :

— ethnocentric corporations : senior management suspicious of foreigners and unfamiliar

business methods ; headquarters retains responsibility for all main decisions ; priority is given to nationals from the headquarters country in filling important posts in foreign subsidiaries ; parent company considered to be superior and have a monopoly of know-how. In practice this type of organization arouses the suspicion of local governments and can lead to nationalistic attacks.

- polycentric corporations : recognition that local situations are different from one another and from the parent country ; subsidiaries operated by the nationals of each country ; parent company relies on financial controls rather than command structure to achieve a profit ; company becomes a confederation of closely connected subsidiaries, many of which have no contact with each other ; only parent company has access to all financial and research data ; parent company remains in the hands of nationals of the headquarters country who occupy all important posts.
- geocentric corporations: posts filled without regard to nationality ; policies formulated without regard to national preferences ; subsidiary directors participate in the formulation of general policies ; headquarters location considered to be an accident of history to be changed according to the convenience of tax laws.

A set of definitions has been suggested by Professor Richard Robinson • which attempts to bring some order into the terms currently used to describe international profit-making organizations, but which also reflect the stage of evolution from the ethnocentric corporation. He proposes :

an international firm is one in which international operations are consolidated in a line office on the division level and, as a matter of policy, is willing to consider all potential strategies for entering foreign markets — up to direct investment;

a multinational firm is one in which, structurally and policy-wise, foreign operations are co-equal with domestic, and management is willing to allocate company resources without regard to national frontiers to achieve corporate objectives. Decisions remain nationally-biased for ownership and headquarters management remain uninational;

a transnational firm is a multinational firm managed and owned by persons of different national origins. Decisions thus become free of national bias;

a supranational firm is a transnational firm legally denationalized by permitting it exclusively to register with, be controlled by, and pay taxes to, some international body established by multinational convention.

It might be possible to establish arbitrarily sets of quantitative criteria which would group corporations into several such groups, or preferably more, in order to split up the higher proportion of organizations at the ethnocentric end of the range. In this way degrees of multinationality could be recognized which would permit satisfactory classification of the sales bureau type of organization. Such a scale could possibly be developed by using the index technique with more ratio criteria, since low index values indicate organizations which are more likely to be ethnocentric as defined above.

The ratio of headquarters country directors to foreign directors does appear to represent the most easily obtainable and least confidential additional criterion. It is the closest approximation to the nationalities of the shareholders and may in fact be preferable since it gives a real picture of the ethnocentrism of the Board and decision making. Information on the shareholders would only give a theoretical picture of the operation of the organization on the assumption that the Board decisions reflected the day to day opinions of shareholders. In addition it is normally by its Board or management that a corporation is judged, rather than by its shareholders.

In examining suitable criteria in the future, provision will have to be made for the consortium arrangement and the bi-national joint venture which is becoming important and widespread. Another type of structure which may not fall within any of the criteria yet suggested is that of a large corporation which controls a complex network of bi-national operations. A further problem is created by individuals, families and national corporations which create and completely control multinational corporations as a means of conducting their international operations. There is also the highly charged question of the distinction, or the necessity for a distinction, between multinational corporation, multina-

tional groups (which have been broadly defined as a collection of enterprises between which any form of link may exist which is sufficiently strong and durable to permit a common economic policy), and international cartels (which have been defined as voluntary agreements among independent enterprises in closely related industries in two or more countries with the purpose of exerting a monopolistic control of the market).

Conclusions

The main question raised by this preliminary study is how restrictive a definition of multinational corporations is required and whether it would be preferable to define criteria to separate groups of corporations of different degrees of internationality in order to cover all cases. It may prove to be the case that many small new corporations with subsidiaries in only a few countries are less ethnocentric and more international than many of the large corporations.

It might be useful to distinguish between long-established corporations with international interests in many countries (mainly trading-companies), large national corporations developing international interests, and smaller corporations recently created as international companies by national corporations from a limited number of countries (usually two to four). It would be an advantage to make any future criteria consistent with those employed to detect international non-profit organizations. The additional-complexity of the more highly developed profit corporations may make it useful to reassess non-profit organization criteria in order to distinguish between the more and the less international in a similar manner. The multinational corporation will become an increasingly important concept over the next few years as mergers and takeovers establish international economic empires. The corporations themselves will have to make great efforts, as some have already done, to become truly international in order to avoid nationalization, discriminatory tariffs, or accusations of economic colonialism. They are faced with increasing complex tax problems and the burden of double taxation, due to the lack of any international legal status or provisions for international non-governmental organizations (whether profit or non-profit).

One solution is the creation of special national legislation in each country to deal with multinational corporations which make their headquarters there. At present only the tax havens such as the Bahamas, Bermuda and Lichtenstein provide an adequate place where a large multinational corporation can establish its central activity. In the case of international non-profit organizations, Belgium is the only country with special legislation. An example may however be set by Peru where legislation has just been proposed to deal specifically with the tax problems of multinational corporations and their employees.

Another suggestion, made is that it is in the interest of national tax authorities and of such corporations that they should pay a single tax to a specially constituted international authority on the basis of their consolidated financial statements. This would avoid the necessity for the current highly complex network of bilateral conventions on double taxation. In view of the significance attached to these corporations as tools for the rational economic development of the world, such a body might alleviate another current problem by providing a source of development funds. The tax funds could be channelled through the United Nations to the countries in greatest need.

The role of the large multinational corporation in aiding the less developed countries has been frequently stressed. This is an important reason for listing these bodies in this Yearbook. Some of the specific functions that they can (but will not necessarily) perform which could contribute to general economic development are, according to Roy Blough : to make sound and profitable investments in developing countries which for less broadly based companies would be too risky; to make use of a world-wide store of technological, managerial, and other knowledge and skills that are likely to be better adapted to the needs of the less developed countries than is the knowledge of business firms that have access only to home-country technology; to create jobs and stimulate the desire for education in the developing countries; to make use of their international communications system to help countries achieve the benefits of cooperation; and to provide developing countries with contacts with foreign markets without which their export trade and industries cannot be

rapidly developed. It is to be hoped that listing these organizations in the Yearbook will contribute to a greater understanding of the role that they will play in developing world society together with the intergovernmental and international non-profit non-governmental organizations.

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