

Gunnar

Myrdal



EXHIBITION ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE



1947-1957

The situation in Europe is dramatic. It takes an exceptional person to navigate the stormy waters between East and West – Gunnar Myrdal is that person.



UNICEF, 1946

More than 50 million people have been killed. The economy of Europe is in shambles. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) provides for food, clothing and shelter.

● THE BIRTH OF THE COMMISSION



First meeting of the General Assembly

On 2 February 1946, Jan Stanczyk, Polish Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, proposes that the UN be in charge of the reconstruction of war-devastated countries.

Resolutions
adopted by the
Economic and Social Council
during its Fourth Session from
28 February to 29 March 1947



Résolutions
adoptées par le
Conseil économique et social
pendant sa Quatrième Session du
28 février au 29 mars 1947

UNITED NATIONS
Lake Success, New York



28 March 1947

Following lengthy negotiations, the ECOSOC decides to create the **Economic Commission for Europe**.

To manage this new department, Trygve Lie, United Nations Secretary-General, chooses Gunnar Myrdal, Swedish Minister of Foreign Trade.



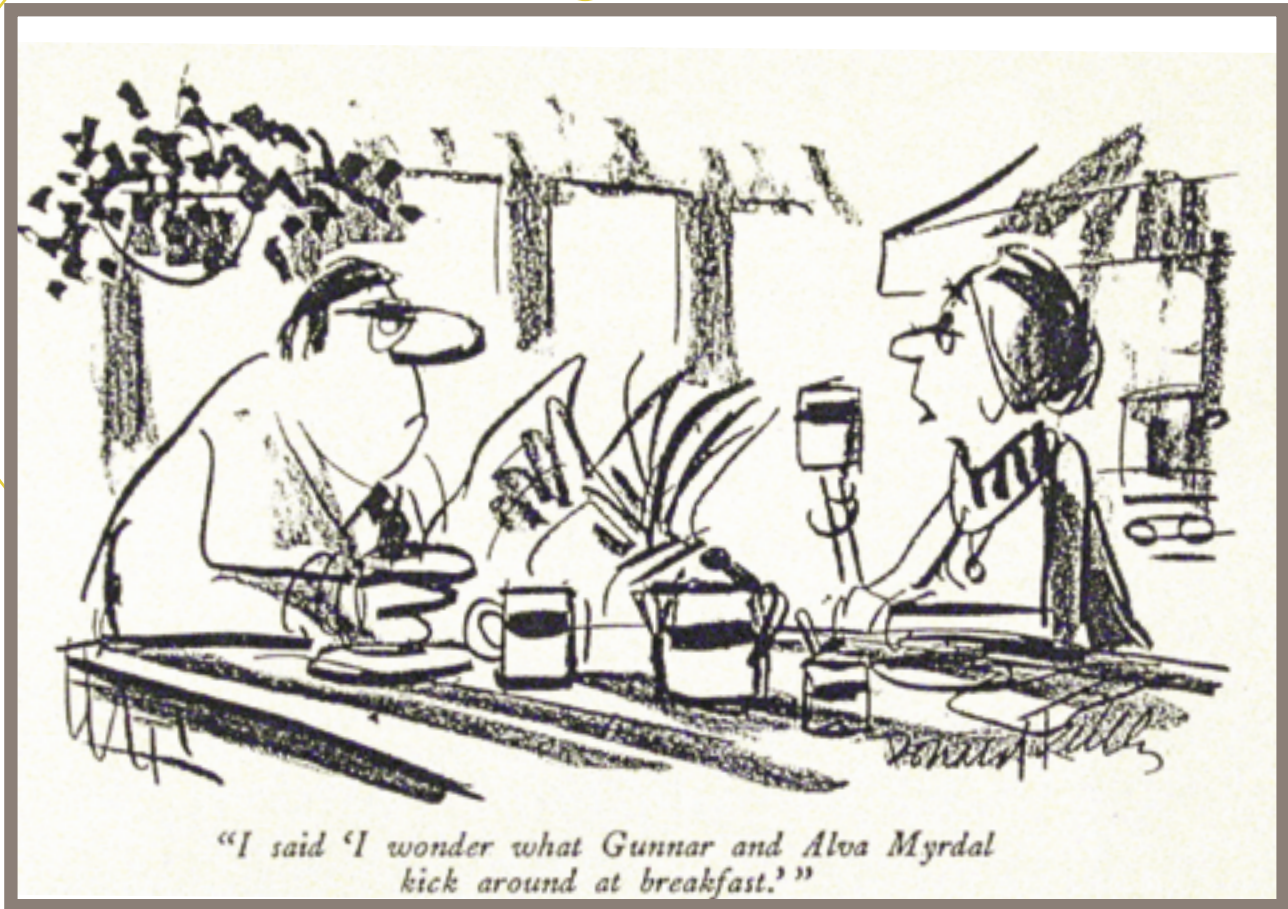
10 April 1947

Who was this 49-year-old man just arrived in Geneva?

A brilliant economist who had graduated from the Stockholm University Law School in 1923 and received a Juris Doctor degree in Economics in 1927.

Professor of Economics at the Stockholm School of Economics from 1933 to 1947, he was simultaneously a Social Democratic Member of Parliament. Gunnar Myrdal is considered by many people, including some of his staff, as a genius.

● GUNNAR MYRDAL EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE UNECE



In Geneva, Gunnar Myrdal puts all his energy into fighting for an organization which will help reconstruct a Europe in crisis. His devotion to his task is such that Alva writes:

« ECE became everything for Gunnar, the family and I nothing.»

In *Alva Myrdal, A Daughter's Memoir*, by Sissela Bok, p.200.



Gunnar Myrdal and Nicholas Kaldor

Gunnar Myrdal's first task is to construct a strong team around him. "Topping the research division, which is the planning centre of ECE, is Nicholas Kaldor, the brain behind Britain's full employment policy, whose striking resemblance to a medieval monk masks a powerful coordinating mind and a sharp eye for economic nonsense hidden behind official phraseology." (The New York Times Magazine, 1948)



The first meeting of the Commission takes place on 2 May 1947.

On 12 July, United States Secretary of State George Marshall launches his famous plan to reconstruct Europe. Everyone including Gunnar Myrdal is sure that the ECE is the best organization to implement this Plan.

The announcement of the creation of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) to manage the Marshall Plan instead of the ECE is a big disappointment.



9th and 11th sessions of the Commission in 1954 and 1956



Despite all the tension of the Cold War, the Commission meets every year.



The efforts made by the Commission to reconstruct the European transport infrastructure are recognized as early as the 1950s. The ECE TIR transit system which aims at facilitating both transport and trade was also launched back in 1949.



Poster which Gunnar Myrdal had in his archives

In the middle of the Berlin blockade crisis, East-West trade is a difficult matter which Gunnar Myrdal tries to tackle.



W. Averell Harriman, US Chief Delegate, and Soviet Chief Delegate A.A. Arutiunian, 4th session

The presence of delegations from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is problematic at the outset, but by the time Gunnar Myrdal leaves, Easterners are assiduous participants in ECE meetings.

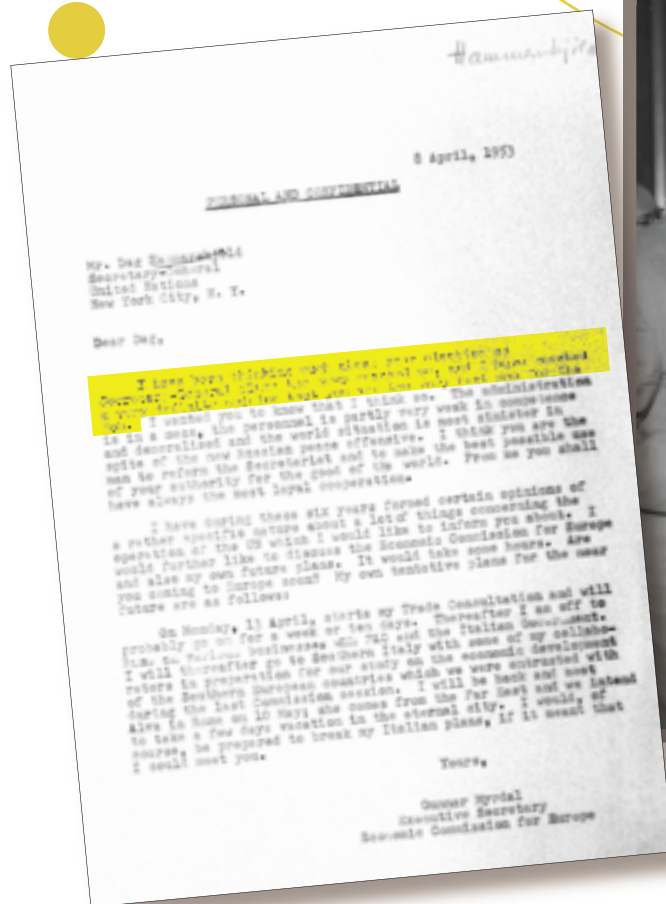


Tito asks Gunnar Myrdal to help him in his negotiations with the Soviet Union.



**Press Conference at UN Headquarters.
From left to right: : Raúl Prebisch (ECLAC); David Owen, ASG for Economic Affairs; Benjamin Cohen, ASG for Public Information; P.S. Lokanathan (ECAFE); Gunnar Myrdal (ECE), 4 June 1952.**

To help ECE survive, Gunnar Myrdal keeps tight links with the other regional commissions.



Gunnar Myrdal and Dag Hammarskjöld

On 12 April 1957 Gunnar Myrdal's resignation is accepted by Dag Hammarskjöld.

What led to this resignation?

Officially his willingness to launch a big study on Asia. But ...

... although he never mentioned it, Gunnar Myrdal was disappointed that his long-time friend Dag Hammarskjöld was appointed Secretary-General instead of him.



After about the third session of the Commission I got up sick and tired and nervous that I used to sleep / while these propaganda tirades went on on both sides / and Anika gave me a pair of big dark glasses so that they should not see that I am asleep. Afterwards I left, as was nervous about the whole thing, and was sitting in my office and sleeping there.... That really happened, and you know it ...

VK: Of course, I do. You left, you were working on something in your office, you are the subject, you could not stand these speeches... My task was after every speech was made or when something more important was said, to ring you up and to summarize it. or if something more dramatic was happening, a clash between delegations, I rushed to the telephone to call you in. When the ministers saw me running, they were joking and saying: Ça va barder ...

Interview of Gunnar Myrdal by Václav Kostecký (13 July 1980)

Gunnar Myrdal is also frustrated by what is happening in Geneva. Things get boring.



Another reason for Gunnar Myrdal's resignation is that...
... he feels lonely.



Alva Myrdal's nomination as Ambassador to India is perfect timing for Gunnar's plans to launch his big study on Asia: "The Asian Drama."



1 September 1957

Sakari Tuomioja (Finland) replaces Gunnar Myrdal as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

Chronology

- 1945** 4 February 1945: Yalta Conference with Stalin, Churchill and, FD Roosevelt.
8 May 1945: Defeat of Germany.
17 July 1945: Potsdam Conference – Germany is officially partitioned into four occupation zones.
- 1946** 10 January 1946: First meeting of the UN General Assembly.
1 February 1946: Trygve Lie of Norway is appointed United Nations Secretary-General.
5 March 1946: Churchill: “an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”
- 1947** 28 March 1947: Birth of the UNECE.
12 July 1947: The Marshall Plan is launched.
- 1948** 21 June 1948: Berlin blockade, until 11 May 1949.
- 1949** January 1949: Creation in Moscow of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).
April 1949: The NATO Treaty is signed.
August 1949: Russia tests its first atomic bomb.
- 1950** 9 May 1950:
Robert Schuman presents its proposal for the creation of what is now the European Union.
- 1951** 9 January 1951: United Nations Headquarters officially opens (New York City).
- 1952** 30 June 1952: End of the Marshall Aid.
23 July 1952: Establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community.
- 1953** 5 March 1953: Stalin dies.
7 April 1953: Dag Hammarskjöld is elected United Nations Secretary-General.
7 September 1953:
Nikita Khrushchev becomes First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- 1954** 2 December 1954: The US Senate «condemns» Senator Joseph McCarthy.
- 1955** 5 May 1955: West Germany becomes a sovereign State.
14 May 1955:
The Warsaw Pact is formed by the communist States of Eastern Europe and the USSR.
- 1956** 4 November 1956: Soviet troops invade Hungary.
- 1957** 25 March 1957: The Treaty of Rome establishes the European Economic Community (EEC).

Thanks

We would like to thank Kaj Fölster for her precious account of her father's life and vision.

Thanks go to the Permanent Mission of Sweden in Geneva.

Thanks also to Mr. Stellan Andersson and the Labour Movement Archives and Library in Stockholm.

Finally, a special thank you to all the people from the Library, the Registry, Records and Archives Unit, and the Publishing Service of the United Nations Office in Geneva, as well as the United Nations Photo Library in New York for their collaboration in organising the exhibition.



The challenge of summarizing the intense life of such an active man as Gunnar Myrdal was further complicated by the fact that he left some 30,000 documents and letters.

Gunnar and Alva Myrdal's archives are well preserved in Stockholm at the Labour Movement Archives and Library by Mr. Stellan Andersson and his team.

Gunnar

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