

Photo Conveys Dignity Amid Deliberations

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The Brussels Conference for the Revision of the Berne Convention convened 59 years ago. From June 5 to 26, 1948, delegates from 35 countries discussed changes to the international agreement. In addition, 18 countries, including the United States and UNESCO, sent observers to the proceedings.

The Berne Convention was signed by 10 countries in 1886. Revisions took place in Paris in 1896, Berlin in 1908, and Rome in 1928. In Rome, the participants agreed to convene again in Brussels in 1935. But politics and World War II delayed the meeting until 1948.

Copyright Office files hold a photo of the Brussels gathering. Arranged behind a table in a room decorated with paintings heroic in size and subject are dignified and statuesque gentlemen. The photo shows no hint that these people had just experienced war's rigors and deprivations.

According to notes on the back of the photo, it was given to Register of Copyrights Abraham Kaminstein on October 8, 1963, by New York lawyer John Schulman, an observer in 1948. On the far right is Belgian delegate Daniel Coppieters de Gibson. Next to him is Belgian delegate Albert Guislain, president of the conference. Standing is Benigne Mentha, who served as director of the Berne Bureau, the forerunner of the World Intellectual Property Organization, from 1938 to 1953.

Alfred Baum of Zurich, a representative of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, wrote a summary of the conference's actions together with impressions of certain participants. Guislain, he said, was "remarkable for his brilliant knowledge of the subject" and "showed complete

mastery in guiding the discussions; he always had the reins firmly in his hand without ever showing a sign of impatience (which in view of many superfluous speeches and remarks would have been understandable)."



As for Mentha, Baum observed, "The amount of work he had to accomplish in the months before and during the conference was enormous, and it required almost superhuman strength. ... His art of handling people is so much more sympathetic as it goes hand in hand with an almost humble modesty and an unflinching kindness."

The conference was, said Baum, exhausting. "The delegates continued working almost until complete exhaustion. The men who worked there must have been made of an especially strong material. ... But the work was not in vain. The thought of having contributed to the improvement of the Convention and—possibly—of having broken new trails for international copyright, should compensate all of the delegates for their sacrifice." ©