

Sir David Owen, head of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and a former administrator of the United Nations development program, died of a heart attack yesterday in a London hospital. He was 65 years old.

Sir David, who was knighted last January, retired from the United Nations last July. He had worked with the organization since its inception.

The Welsh economist was a member of the British delegation to the founding conference in San Francisco in 1945. He recalled recently that he had financed the early days of United Nations operations with a £30 loan from his London bank account.

“We lived on that £30 for almost two weeks in 1945,” he said.

The administrative task of organizing the United Nations was entrusted to Gladwyn Jebb, the senior British delegate.

‘Get this Thing Started’

“I was Jebb's deputy,” Sir David recounted, “and he turned to me and announced: You do it I'll handle the high diplomacy; you take on the rest. Find an office and a secretary and get this thing started.”

This thing” was a world organization formed by 51 war time allies without a staff or money, and only a promise that it could make London its temporary home.

So Sir David rushed back to London aboard a British plane to borrow a typewriter from the Foreign Office and a secretary from the War Office.

“Together in a taxi we headed for Church House in Westminster, drove through the courtyard and knocked on the door. The old custodian peered at us across a barricade of sandbags used as protection against bombing and demanded to know who we were.

“‘We are the United Nation.’ I remember answering. And that was the beginning.”

Helped Create Secretariat

During the next few years, Sir David helped set up the Secretariat and organized the first economic affairs department, heading it with the rank of Assistant Secretary General. In that capacity he helped set up regional economic commissions and persuaded prominent economists to head them.

In 1949 he was instrumental in launching the first major effort by the United Nations to offer technical assistance to developing countries — a project that was given impetus by President Harry S. Truman's 1949 inaugural address promising aid on a grand scale to help others.

Sir David served as chairman of the technical assistance board for 15 years, until its merger in 1966 with the special fund to form the current development program. He was co-administrator of that agency with Paul Hoffman.

Last August, a month after his retirement from the United Nations, Sir David became secretary general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, with headquarters in London.

Traveled Over World

Sir David's new position entailed extensive traveling, as did his United Nations post. He visited the organization's regional offices and affiliates throughout the world in an effort to improve over-all administration.

Of Welsh parentage, Arthur David Kemp Owen was born in Pontypool, Monmouthshire, a district technically English but ethnically Welsh. His father was a minister.

Sir David graduated from Leeds University, where he specialized in economics, receiving a master's degree in 1929.

After lecturing on economics for a short period, he became director of the Sheffield Social Survey and for the next seven years conducted a study of living conditions in Sheffield.

Shortly after Queen Elizabeth II created him a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George last January, the economist confessed to an interviewer that the prospect of being addressed as "Sir David" made him smile.

Mountaineering was a great passion of Sir David, but he said once that he considered books to be his chief extravagance.

He leaves his wife, the former Elisabeth Elsa Miller; three sons, Roger, Michael and Hugh; a daughter, Milian, and a grand child.