Committee III - Expansion of Trade

INTERNATIONAL TRADE INFORMATION CENTRE

Proposal by the Brazilian Representative

As requested by Committee III in paragraph 16 of its recent interim report (L/1859) the present paper sets out in detail the proposal made by the representative of Brazil at the Committee meeting on 10 October 1962 on the setting up of an "International Trade Information Centre".

The reasons behind the proposal

The less-developed countries do not have the financial resources to enable them to maintain the type of extensive trade information and trade commissioner services which the industrialized countries, particularly the more important trading countries, normally have. Thus the exporter in the less-developed countries is placed at a disadvantage when seeking outlets for his products, particularly when attempting to break into new markets. For these reasons, it is felt that an international centre which could collect, collate, publish and disseminate trade information would serve to meet a real need of the less-developed countries in the field of export promotion without imposing a financial burden on these countries beyond their means. It is also felt that industrialized countries themselves might be able to take advantage of such a service which many of them could not individually afford. Even those industrialized countries which currently maintain an extensive service might be prepared to support such a "centre" since it would enable them to effect considerable savings in that they could draw on it for general information and could concentrate their own resources and staff in meeting the specific needs of their own export trade. In this way much of the present duplication of effort in the collection of general information by the larger trading countries could be avoided.

The secretariat was asked to report on the implications of this proposal particularly those relating to finance. It is felt, however, that such implications could probably be more clearly seen and more reliably appraised after this proposal has been further discussed by the Committee and has consequently taken more definite shape. It is proposed that the secretariat report should be prepared after the Committee meeting in the week of 29 October 1962, and after discussions, particularly on financing and staff aspects, with contracting parties which maintain extensive trade information services.
The establishment of the proposed "centre", by providing comprehensive data as regards trading conditions and opportunities, could do much to foster an increase in the volume of world trade, thus furthering the attainment of the objectives of GATT.

The type of trade information to be collected by the proposed "centre"

The "centre's" work should cover the following topics:

(a) As regards individual countries:
- National and regional income and purchasing power
- Market limitations and opportunities
- Port and trading centres
- Internal transport system
- Government representatives abroad
- Customs tariff
- Internal taxes
- Import licensing requirements
- Quantitative restrictions
- Currency and exchange system
- Documentation requirements
- Consular formalities
- State-trading organizations, their requirements and addresses
- Sanitary control requirements
- Law as regards agencies or associate companies
- Advertising media available, rates and addresses
- Trading structure (e.g. availability of future markets)
- Banks and other financial institutions
- Credit structure and availability
- Insurance availability and institutions
- Names and addresses of importers and exporters
- Postage rates and postal packaging requirements
- Weights and measures
- Visas and inoculation requirements for visiting businessmen
- Treatment of samples for duty purposes
- Patent regulations
- Trade fairs
- Government and private tenders

(b) General
- International shipping and airlines; their routes, addresses, freight rates and packaging requirements
- International advertising media; (e.g. journals enjoying international circulation) addresses and rates
- International telecommunications; facilities and rates
Methods of disseminating information

The "centre's" distribution of information should take four basic forms:

(i) an "encyclopedia" containing information of a type likely to require periodic revision, e.g. tariffs and shipping rates. This "encyclopedia" would be published in loose-leaf form and would constantly be brought up-to-date by means of loose-leaf revision sheets; alternatively it could be issued in bound volumes, every year or two, and brought up-to-date by periodic bulletins;

(ii) supplementary booklets relating to specific countries, containing information of a more detailed and enduring nature, e.g. company and commercial laws, lists of importers and exporters, and patent regulations;

(iii) a fortnightly or monthly magazine carrying information of a non-recurrent type, e.g. trade fairs and tenders;

(iv) by correspondence in response to specific requests for detailed data or explanations of national legal requirements by individual exporters or groups of exporters.

In all cases the "centre" should endeavour to render the often technical language used in official publications into a form which would be easily assimilable by exporters.

Sources of information

Clearly a variety of methods and sources would have to be employed to collect the type of information envisaged above. For information relating to contracting parties to GATT, governments can be asked to give substantive assistance in this work. For non-contracting parties, special arrangements would have to be made with the governments in question. Membership in the "centre" might be independent of participation in GATT but would be a condition for inclusion of information on member countries. The representative of Brazil considers that the GATT and other international organizations already possess material of the type which could be useful to the "centre".

Financing

The "centre" would become self-sufficient on the basis of income derived from subscriptions. However, the initial financing, which was likely to be considerable, might have to be provided by governments. Percentage shares of world trade might be a satisfactory basis for assessing contributions of individual governments. As regards subscriptions, exporters should be encouraged to subscribe to the whole "service" to be provided by the "centre" i.e. the three types of publications and the correspondence facility. The cost of individual subscription could follow a sliding scale: lowest for contracting parties members of the centre, higher for non-contracting parties members of the centre, and highest for non-members.
Clearly the cost of the proposed "centre" would depend to a considerable extent on the number of languages it employed. The centre should initially publish in English, French and Spanish and that publication in other languages should be dependent upon the level of the subscriber demand in different countries.

Relations between the proposed centre and the GATT

It might prove practicable for the CONTRACTING PARTIES to establish the centre as an autonomous organization under their general supervision.