Twenty-first Session of the Contracting Parties

OPENING SESSION

The twenty-first session of the Contracting Parties to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade opened on Monday 24 February 1964 in Geneva.

The Chairman of the Contracting Parties, Mr. J.H. Warren (Canada) made the following opening address:

"It is nine months since the last meeting of Trade Ministers was held here in Geneva. This was the largest and most important meeting ever convened by the Contracting Parties. The Conclusions adopted by the Ministers constitute a programme of work for the Contracting Parties in response to the challenges and problems of our decade. This programme has occupied most of our attention since last May.

"The task in which we are engaged touches virtually the whole field of trade relations and trade policy. Much work has been done and much remains to be done. At this session we shall review what has so far been achieved and address ourselves to the balance of our mandate. I shall not describe the detail, nor at this stage comment on the intricacies of the problems encountered - some of these will be taken up during the second part of our session - but I do wish to recall our objectives and underline the importance of the issues involved.

"The GATT is at one and the same time an institution and perhaps more importantly the embodiment of the treaty obligations with respect to trade and commerce which our governments have exchanged or are prepared to exchange. The contractual relationships which we establish one with another and which we generalize through application of the most-favoured-nation principle are safeguarded by a set of agreed rules to govern the conduct of trade. These rules are, of course, far from perfect but they represent a not inconsiderable measure of international achievement in an area where national interests are by no means the same but where there is
a high measure of common interest in buttressing and furthering the mutually beneficial exchange of goods between countries. As we move forward and adjust our co-operation to the new needs of our day and of the years ahead we must be careful not to imperil the accomplishments of those who want before us. Rather, from the base rock of our foundations should we modernize our house. Let us hope that when time has passed our successors will be able to say: "They also builded well".

"The efforts of the Contracting Parties go far beyond their contractual arrangements and related rules. These are the expression of their rights and obligations, but the fundamental objective is to contribute through trade to the raising of standards of living and the development of the economies of all contracting parties. Accordingly we are pledged to play our part towards the general betterment. Within this framework our attention has been increasingly directed to what we can individually and collectively do to assist the less-advanced countries to overcome their pressing and vital problems of economic development. Certain of these problems fall outside our competence, but it is agreed that in trade and related areas a great deal can and should be accomplished. Progress has been made but some differences of approach as regards the best way to move ahead remain to be resolved.

Activities concerned with the expansion and improvement of the trade of the developing countries constitute a major part of our work programme. At this session we shall be considering possible adjustments to our Agreement designed to provide a better institutional basis for these activities. Proposals have now been received from a number of contracting parties for a substantial enlargement of the text of the GATT by the addition of a new chapter dealing specifically with the problems of the less-developed countries. These proposals will be examined during the session by the Committee which has been set up for this special purpose in accordance with the instructions given by the Ministers at their meeting last May.

"The Ministers also called for an examination of several particular proposals for rendering assistance to the developing countries in promoting their economic development and expanding their export trade. These include the possibility of providing preferential tariff treatment for their exports; the means for making additional assistance available for industrial growth and the rôle that GATT might play in collaborating with other intergovernmental organizations having special competence in this field; and thirdly, the establishment of a trade information and trade promotion advisory service within the GATT. Machinery has been created for the examination of these possibilities, and proposals will be taken up during the session."
"The Ministers agreed that a further comprehensive round of trade negotiations should be held in 1964. These negotiations, which have come to bear the name of the last President of the United States, may prove to be as significant as any in the history of the General Agreement. Every one of our governments has an interest in carrying this negotiation through to a successful conclusion. In the Kennedy round we have an opportunity to make a really significant cut in barriers to our mutual trade in industrial, agricultural and other primary products. We have adopted the ambitious, but realistic, course of enlarging the scope of the negotiations to include the reduction or elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade, in addition to the reduction of customs duties. Special recognition has been given to the matter of the expansion of agricultural trade.

"During these past sixteen years we have made remarkable progress in the reduction of duties and in giving stability to tariff levels, and trade has been liberated from most of the quantitative restrictions by which it was confined in the post-war period when the GATT first entered into force. Progress has, however, been less marked in the agricultural than in the industrial sector. But we are agreed that further work remains to be done, and I trust that in preparing for and entering into the forthcoming negotiations we shall all bend our energies to find the way or ways best calculated to yield positive results to the benefit of the trade and economic development of all our countries.

"The tasks ahead are known. This is not the moment for oratory from your Chairman. Rather we should get on expeditiously with our work and our negotiations. In so doing, the Contracting Parties will be making an important contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the development decade and to the success of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

"Since the twentieth session, sixteen countries have acceded to the General Agreement under the provisions of paragraph 5(c) of Article XXVI. These countries are:

Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Congo (Brazzaville)
Cyprus
Dahomey
Gabon
Ivory Coast
Jamaica
Kenya
Kuwait
Madagascar
Mauritania
Niger
Senegal
Upper Volta

In addition, the Government of Togo has announced its intention to avail itself of the provisions of Article XXVI.
"In a sense these countries have been in the GATT all along. But they have now assumed full membership. Speaking on behalf of the contracting parties, I wish to extend a warm welcome to their representatives on this occasion when they are formally joining in our deliberations for the first time. We shall look forward to their active participation in our work.

"I also wish to welcome the delegation from the Government of Spain, which has acceded to the GATT under Article XXXIII since our last session, and to the delegations from the United Arab Republic and Yugoslavia, whose arrangements for provisional accession were drawn up at the last session and have now entered into force.

"At the present session we shall examine applications for accession from the Government of Viet-Nam and for provisional accession from the Government of Iceland. If, as I hope, a successful outcome attends our discussions with the representatives of these two countries, the total participation in the GATT would then stand at sixty-three contracting parties and thirteen associated governments. It will be a source of gratification to the older contracting parties that so many countries have joined, or are about to join, their ranks and have thus recognized the valuable rôle played by the General Agreement in the promotion of world trade.

"The twenty-first session lies before us, and I wish you well in your deliberations, and declare the twenty-first session open.

It was of particular satisfaction to the Contracting Parties to note that nearly all new members were less-developed countries. The total membership of GATT amounts to seventy-four countries, including sixty-one countries full contracting parties; five countries which have acceded provisionally; two countries which participate in the work of the Contracting Parties under special arrangements; and four countries who maintain a de facto application of the GATT pending final decisions as to their future commercial policy. Of these seventy-four countries, approximately two thirds may be considered as less-developed countries.