Summary Record of the Seventh Meeting of the Tariff Negotiations Committee

held at the Marine Spa on Monday, 15 January 1951, at 3.30 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. J.A. TONKIN (Australia)


In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Wilgress and of the Vice Chairman, Mr. Giese, the Committee elected Mr. TONKIN (Australia) to preside over the meeting.


Mr. Van BLANKENSTEIN, Chairman of the Tariff Negotiations Working Party, presented the Report. He recalled that the Tariff Negotiations Working Party, in its endeavour to accelerate the pace of the negotiations, had constantly kept their progress under review. Formal and informal meetings had been held to examine the position of negotiations under Article XXVIII, the negotiations of acceding countries and the principal negotiations of contracting parties among themselves.

It had appeared in the course of these reviews that the date of 22 December 1950, fixed by the Tariff Negotiations Committee for the completion of negotiations under Article XXVIII, would in most cases not be met.

Satisfactory progress was shown by the negotiations of acceding governments though it seemed that in some cases it would be difficult to meet the deadline of 31 January set by the Tariff Negotiations Committee; it appeared however that they would be completed by 28 February.

The progress of negotiations among contracting parties was not in all cases satisfactory.

Since the Christmas recess the Working Party had examined a report from the Secretariat on the progress of the negotiations (GAT/TN.2/32). It appeared from this document that there were still 74 negotiations listed as possible but which had not yet been scheduled to begin. This figure had, in the meantime, been reduced and stood at present at 61. The number was however still considerable.

Perhaps more important were however the 52 negotiations under Article XXVIII which had not been completed by 22 December. Even at the present date this figure could not be reduced below 40.

In the light of all the information which the Working Party had been able to gather, they had approached the question of fixing an official date for the termination of the Conference. There were very important reasons which required that the participating governments should agree on such a date. These were not only of an administrative character. There were also very important practical
reasons, amongst which the difficulties encountered by governments in keeping their officials at Torquay over a long period.

Agreement had been found in the Tariff Negotiations Working Party on the date of 22 March for the signature of the Final Act. Working back from that date the Working Party agreed that, in order to leave sufficient time for the drawing up of lists of concessions, their circulation for examination and the preparation of the final signature text, the latest date for the termination of the tariff negotiations would be 28 February. There had been some discussion on the significance of this later date and it was agreed that it should not be considered a target but rather as the definite date on which all bilateral tariff negotiations should end. Exceptionally, if it were found that a certain negotiation was approaching conclusion and could be terminated in a few days, the parties concerned might ask that the possibility of granting an extension be considered.

He proposed that the Committee accept the recommendations of the Tariff Negotiations Working Party. He thought that perhaps the Committee might delegate the authority to grant such any exceptional extension to the Tariff Negotiations Working Party.

Speaking as representative of the Netherlands, he wished strongly to support the proposal. The Government had instructed their delegation to terminate negotiations by the 28 February, a date which appeared to them satisfactorily to balance the advantages which they thought they could reap from the negotiations and the disadvantages of having to forego the services of their officials for several months. He thought that he could speak for the Benelux countries as a whole in saying that their delegations would do their utmost to contribute towards the speedy conclusion of negotiations.

Mr. CORSE (United States) felt that the picture drawn by Mr. Van Blankenstein was so clear that there was nothing to add. He considered the proposed date as reasonable but wished to emphasize that in the case of several negotiations it would mean overtime work for delegations coupled with the honest desire of all to reach agreement. He welcomed the increased seriousness and willingness which were now evident.

With respect to the negotiations under Article XXVIII he thought they would have to be completed very soon indeed if they wanted to meet the deadline at all.

The agreed necessity of concluding before Easter had caused the fixing of a date earlier than he would otherwise have chosen, but in the circumstances, he expressed his full agreement with it and appealed to all delegations to take their task to heart.

The Committee agreed to fix the date for the completion of bilateral negotiations on the 28 February and for the signature of the Final Act on 22 March.

The Committee adjourned at 3.55 p.m.