NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO HEADS OF DELEGATIONS

A number of delegations, following my statement on organizational questions at last week's plenary meeting, have asked me whether I would be willing to circulate a note containing my ideas on the future of the organization. I feel that in fact my views have been quite frequently expressed during recent sessions of the CONTRACTING PARTIES and I would in any case not wish at this stage formally to put forward any specific proposals. However, as my thinking has evolved somewhat during the last few months, I am circulating the present note which contains some ideas which Heads of delegations may find useful to have.

The basis for all my thinking on this problem is that the organization must be such that the policy and work of the organization result from the direct participation in its activities of the contracting parties. It follows from this that I am not in favour of building up a large bureaucracy. I have always considered, and continue to think, that the essential role of the secretariat must be as an aid to negotiation and consultation between the contracting parties. Accordingly the staff should remain relatively small in numbers but high in quality. It is for this reason that I have insisted so frequently on caution in following too automatically the structure and gradings of other large-scale organizations whose work is of a different character. I consider that the secretariat does need reinforcement and that for the reasons given above this should be at the higher levels.

As for the structure of the organization, my main recommendation relates to the permanent executive board or committee. I have given this question the most careful thought over the years, and I am now inclined to suggest that the CONTRACTING PARTIES ought to establish a permanent Council which would meet at monthly or bi-monthly intervals, and at other times as required. I would not be in favour of trying to limit membership of the Council but to open it to all contracting parties who are prepared to accredit a permanent representative with appropriate qualifications to the organization. But this does not necessarily mean that so far as European contracting parties are concerned, such a permanent representative need or should be stationed at the headquarters of the organization. In view of the easy accessibility of Geneva from all European capitals this does not appear essential. On the other hand it would appear essential in the case of non-European countries. I would not be in favour of making an issue of the powers of this Council. In general, and initially, I would not see it having powers of decision going beyond those at present entrusted to the Intersessional Committee, but I would foresee that as the Council develops and as the confidence of contracting parties grew in it, it may well be that in the course of time the same powers of decision would be delegated to the Council. I repeat, however, that I would hope that this issue would not be allowed to complicate the decision to establish it. The Chairman of the Council should either be the Executive Secretary or a permanent representative resident in Geneva, appointed by the CONTRACTING PARTIES.
Coming back to the question of the secretariat. I feel that the Executive Secretary himself should be an individual of the standing and authority appropriate to the importance which this post has now come to have. I need hardly say how great a contribution the Executive Heads of the IMF and the IBRD made to the strength of these organizations, and the GATT post seems to me to be of no less importance. I have already made it abundantly clear to the CONTRACTING PARTIES that I am entirely ready - and indeed more than willing - to make way for a successor, and I would be happy if this facilitated the objective to which I have just referred. Needless to say, the action of the CONTRACTING PARTIES on this matter should not be influenced in any way by sentimental or personal considerations. Secondly, although as I have just said, I do not foresee the need for any very large expansion of staff, I do think that the secretariat urgently needs strengthening at the higher levels. Specifically I feel that it would be desirable to have three Deputy or Assistant Executive Secretaries. This would greatly assist the Executive Secretary in the task of maintaining close and continuing consultation with all contracting parties, particularly those outside the European region. It would also assist him in being able to ensure adequate representation at meetings of other organizations, a function which is continually growing in importance. Finally, it would also be of great help in the work of public relations to which I referred in my previous statement. Incidentally, if this suggestion were agreed to I would be inclined, at any rate at this time, to withdraw my previous suggestion for the creation of regional offices. I do not think that regional offices are as an effective a contact as visits from high officials from headquarters, and the enlargement of the top level staff of the secretariat would make this much easier to arrange.

The budgetary implications of the changes I propose would not be very substantial, and my feeling is that it should be possible to establish a ceiling for the budget over the next few years, not exceeding US$1 million.

Finally, there would be considerable administrative advantage if the organizational arrangements could be formalized. Some years ago I made a suggestion whereby this could be done by a decision under Article XXV. I still remain of the opinion that this should be legally possible, and I would be prepared to revert to this suggestion if requested.