

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON  
TARIFFS AND TRADE

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CONTRACTING PARTIES

Fourth Session

Speech by Mr. L. D. Wilgress, Chairman of the  
Contracting Parties at the closing meeting  
of the Fourth Session

Representatives of the CONTRACTING PARTIES:-

We have now completed the work assigned to us for the Fourth Session. It is only a little over five weeks since the Session opened on February 23rd. The CONTRACTING PARTIES, therefore, have shown once more that they can get through a fairly heavy agenda in an expeditious and business-like manner. The way in which we have got through our work at this Session has enabled us to recover the ground lost at the Third Session at Annecy when the unduly protracted character of our deliberations gave rise to doubts about the ability of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to administer efficiently the instrument which brought about their existence.

It is most important that our session should be short and business-like. It is in this way only that we can be assured of high-level representation by the individual contracting parties, which is so important both for the influence of the CONTRACTING PARTIES on trade problems and for the quality of their work. The experience which we have gained at this Session will stand us in good stead at future sessions. There are still some respects in which the methods of handling our business can be improved, and I shall touch upon these later on. Before

doing so, however, I would like to stress what we have been able to accomplish at this Session.

We have taken important steps in the direction of making the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade a constructive force for lessening trade barriers and for increasing the total volume of world trade. We have given a preliminary examination to the quantitative restrictions now in force with a view to determining the degree to which they are permitted under the provisions of the General Agreement. This has pointed the way to their progressive removal, which is one of the basic objectives of the General Agreement. We have also taken the first steps in a comprehensive review of the operation of the balance-of-payments provisions of the General Agreement. While we have learned the wisdom of proceeding slowly in this examination, and perhaps have not accomplished at this Session all that at one time seemed likely, we have laid sound foundations for our future activities in this important aspect of our work. At our next Session our attention will be directed to drawing up the type of questionnaire which is likely to be most effective for obtaining the information essential to the future examination of the operation of quantitative restrictions and the exceptions to the rule of non-discrimination. We have also arranged for consultations to be undertaken at the next Session with those contracting parties who have introduced recent changes into their import programmes. These will comprise the chief items on the agenda for our next Session, and I am sure that between now and the next Session the representatives of the CONTRACTING PARTIES will be giving careful thought to the best methods by which we can pursue those aspects of our work which are so vital to the future operation of the General

Agreement.

Besides the valuable work which has been done in respect of quantitative restrictions and the balance-of-payments provisions, we have been able to deal at this Session with a number of other interesting aspects of our work. We have completed the arrangements for the 1950 tariff negotiations, which will be the most ambitious set of tariff negotiations ever undertaken. The steps taken to secure a prolongation of the assured life of the concessions in the Geneva and Annecy Schedules has been an important part of the preparations for the tariff negotiations. We have been glad that, in addition to representatives of the Annecy acceding governments, we have had with us at this Session observers from some of the countries who have declared their desire to accede to the General Agreement as a result of the Torquay negotiations. The presence of these observers has materially assisted us in the consideration of these questions. The Torquay negotiations are being held at a time when tariffs once more are attaining major significance. I am confident that the ground has been well-prepared for the negotiations which will take place at Torquay, and that all that is now needed to assure the success of these negotiations is for the seed to be sown in the shape of the proper exchange of request lists, which we hope will result in the sprouting at Torquay of far-reaching reductions in tariffs. If this is the case, we will have taken one further step in the direction of creating those conditions which, in the not-too-distant future, should permit world trade to flow with a minimum of interference from trade barriers.

Unlike previous sessions, our Fourth Session has been characterized by the relatively few complaints brought by one contracting party against another. We have, however, dealt with these complaints in that spirit of understanding, but with

a firm adherence to the basic principles of the General Agreement, which has distinguished the CONTRACTING PARTIES ever since their inception. We have by now developed a technique for handling the procedures of the General Agreement concerning the settlement of disputes which should be invaluable to us in the future. It should have given rise to that confidence in the fair-minded and judicial attitude of the CONTRACTING PARTIES which will enable individual contracting parties in the future to resort to these procedures with every assurance of receiving fair treatment.

The experiences which we have had since the Third Session at Annecy have shown that, contrary to the expectations at that Session, there has been no need for the CONTRACTING PARTIES to resort to the elaborate intersessional procedures which were drawn up at the Third Session. This is particularly the case with respect to the balance-of-payments provisions, because our work relating to these provisions at this Session has been charted for many months in advance. The fixed time limits in Article XVIII may make it difficult to avoid resort to intersessional procedures in connection with measures notified under that Article, but I sincerely trust that the need will not arise. Governments find it difficult enough to spare personnel to attend our regular sessions and it will become an undue burden on governments if we have to call upon them also to send representatives to intersessional committees which might have to be called at short notice to attend to some matter which technically could not be held over until the next regular session. I am sure all representatives of contracting parties will agree that if means can be found of avoiding resort to intersessional procedure it will meet with their governments'

approval.

One lesson which we have learned at this Session is that it is important to begin consideration of time-consuming items on the agenda as early as possible. I therefore hope that we will never again have to postpone consideration of an important and time-consuming item because certain delegations have not been able to have their experts available at the opening of a session. It is also very desirable that if any government places an item on the agenda, they should be prepared to have this item taken up at an early stage in our deliberations and not left over until the last days of the session. Experience at this Session has also shown the desirability of a government submitting adequate supporting documentation at the same time as it proposes an item for inclusion in the agenda of a session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

I am sure that the delegations of the countries concerned will not object to my having made these criticisms of what happened at this Session. I do so only in the interest of our future work. We must also in future endeavour to see that the reports of our working parties are, so far as possible, taken up at regular intervals during the session and not left until the last days of the session. At this Fourth Session seven of our eight working parties submitted their reports in the closing days of the Session. Better consideration can be given to these reports by the CONTRACTING PARTIES if too many of the reports of working parties do not have to be dealt with in the few days left to us at the end of a session. I therefore hope that at our Fifth Session we will be able to arrange that working party reports are completed and submitted in plenary meeting at regular intervals throughout the session without leaving too

heavy a backlog of work for the closing meetings.

Our proceedings have been clouded by the sad event which has deprived us of the active participation of the delegate who had the longest record of association with the General Agreement and the events which led up to the conclusion of that instrument. For those of us who have been identified with this work for a long time, the death of Mr. Shackle was a blow which left us stunned, and I am sure the same feeling was shared by those of you who only got to know him at this Session. For most of us, he was not only a colleague, but also a friend. His contribution to our work was immeasurable. He had attended every one of our meetings and was identified actively with the preparatory work of the Havana Charter dating back to the first preliminary discussions of 1942. In extending our heartfelt sympathies to the United Kingdom Government and to the United Kingdom Delegation for the loss they have suffered, we are also conscious of what it means to all of us to be deprived of the active and valuable co-operation of "Shack", as he was familiarly known to most of us.

To turn once again to the brighter side of what we have been able to accomplish at this Session, I wish to extend our most sincere thanks to the chairmen of the working parties, who did so much to contribute to the success of this Session. The delegations of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Norway and South Africa can be congratulated for the contributions which they made to our work by making available such outstanding chairmen to preside over our working parties. We have never been better served in this respect than at this Session.

It is also with gratitude that, once again, the occasion

has arisen for me to extend to Mr. Wyndham White and all members of the Secretariat our sincere thanks for the able and efficient help they have given to our deliberations. We are fortunate in having the services of such competent men as our Executive Secretary and the Associate Executive Secretary, Mr. Royer, both of whom did so much to prepare the ground for our deliberations. The same applies to all members of the Secretariat. There is probably no international organization which has so small a secretariat, but there is also probably no other secretariat of an international organization which can surpass the efficiency and the cheerful spirit shown by the small group who work for us. We are indeed fortunate in this respect and it is with great pleasure that I extend sincere thanks to each and every member of the Secretariat.

A heavy burden has fallen during this Session upon our interpreters and it is difficult to do justice to what we owe to them. They have had to work hard with little respite and I very much feared at one time that we were placing too heavy a burden upon Mr. Glémet and Miss Ginsberg. I hope the thanks we extend to them, and also to Mr. Sartin, will recompense them for the effort they have had to put forth to give us the high standard of service we required.

Finally, I want to pay my tribute to all the representatives of the CONTRACTING PARTIES who have so materially assisted in making this Session a success. It is due to them that the constant reiteration of arguments has been avoided and that a spirit of accommodation has been shown which has enabled us to get through our work in the time allotted to us. I am sure that if this spirit continues the CONTRACTING PARTIES will continue to gain in strength and to fulfil their role as the only inter-

national forum in which problems of commercial policy and international trade are now being discussed on a global basis. I extend to you all a very happy return to your home countries and trust that you will return to our Fifth Session with renewed vigour to tackle the difficult problems which lie before us.