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SPEECH BY DR. H. C. COOMES, HEAD OF THE AUSTRALIAN
DELEGATION BEFORE FINAL PLENIARY SESSION

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen:

The Australian delegation, like other delegations, has labored here to draft a Charter upon which can be built healthy commercial relations between nations. My Government has yet to consider this Charter. In doing so, it will decide whether under it the Australian people can enjoy security and growing economic opportunity. It is natural that we, like other delegations, should find elements in this Charter with which we do not agree. All previous attempts consciously to promote freer and expanding international trade failed because they ignored the need to provide means by which obligations can be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances. We fear that even in its present form machinery provided in the Charter for the review of obligations in the event of widespread unemployment and the collapse of effective demand for the products of international trade will prove clumsy and ineffective. Similarly, while my Government looks with favor upon the establishment of Customs Unions and free trade areas, it fears that the attempt to write into the Charter precise definitions and rigid requirements to govern situations which cannot be precisely foreseen may stultify their development or impose unwarranted hardships upon other countries. These difficulties my Government will have to take into account in making its over-all assessment of the value of the Charter to Australia and to the world. I cannot predict the outcome of that assessment, but I can assure this Conference that my Government believes profoundly that the future peace and welfare of the world depends upon the steady development of international co-operation in economic matters, and that it will give full weight to this belief in reaching its final decision.

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It has been the privilege of my delegation to participate in the work of preparing this Charter in London, New York, Geneva and now in Havana. We have seen it merge slowly, moulded and shaped by conflict, by argument, and by compromise. From the first day in London there has been apparent through all this conflict and argument a consistent pattern indicating a single fundamental issue. The first draft of the Charter was presented to us as a means of freeing international trade from the restraints of national commercial policies. There underlay it the conception of economic freedom as essentially the absence of restraint. To many of us mere absence of restraint, while an important element in freedom, is, taken by itself, a negative and empty thing. Many of us are by experience and philosophy convinced that if economic freedom is to be a real and living thing, it must mean economic opportunity. We have been made aware that positive opportunity does not automatically come to the under-developed, the under-privileged, the unemployed, and to the poverty-stricken. For the peoples of most countries of the world at least, positive action must be taken to create it. Furthermore, we have been aware that positive action to create real economic opportunity may sometimes limit the complete freedom from restraint of those who already enjoy full economic opportunity.

Throughout all the battles of the Charter, therefore, we have seen this clash between two conceptions of economic freedom and have directed our efforts to increasing the positive content of the Charter so as to establish a just balance between them. To our mind it is the measure of the success of the work of these Conferences that the Charter, while still recognising that arbitrary and purposeless restraint is evil, recognises also the right, and, indeed, the obligation of governments to create economic opportunity for their people by maintaining high levels of employment and by offering greater security and stability of prices and of incomes for their primary producers. For it is upon those things that in the long run will depend the capacity of the peoples of the world to buy in the international markets of the world.

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Mr. Chairman, my delegation believes that the Charter makes it possible for an International Trade Organization to be set up which will contribute substantially ^{to} the fuller achievement of both elements in a complete and balanced conception of economic freedom; to contribute to the elimination of unnecessary restraints and at the same time to help build real economic opportunity for the nations and peoples of the world. However, the Charter can do no more than make this possible. What the International Trade Organization will in fact achieve depends upon the determination and good will of the nations which constitute it. Throughout this and previous Conferences concerning the preparation of the Charter, the delegations here have learned to recognise the justice of the aspirations and the reality of the problems of peoples other than our own and so to make provision for their achievement and solution. This is a habit which cannot be long sustained without regular exercise. We cannot assume that the International Trade Organization will automatically continue along the road which we have so laboriously learned to recognize. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and the ITO can build and guard economic freedom in its fullest and truest sense only if we, the nations which have created it, work with determination and understanding, with tolerance and humanity to preserve and to develop what we have here created.

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