

Singapore Ministerial: The Agenda & the Objectives

As the first ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), December 9-13, 1996, the Singapore Conference will set the tone for the organization's ongoing and future work. The December meeting will be mainly about taking stock of how the WTO is working, and reviewing the implementation of the biggest trade agreement in history.

The meeting is not intended to launch a new round of negotiations; it should, however, lay the groundwork for future trade liberalization and rule-making. Although the Uruguay Round agreements made vast and sweeping improvements, the comprehensive framework of rules that the global trading system needs is far from complete.

The meeting's agenda is lengthy, with a variety of issues on the table. One will be drafting a political declaration to guide the WTO's efforts in coming years. From Canada's perspective, we would like to see the political declaration reflect three principles. Specifically, it is our ultimate goal to see a world in which trade and investment flow freely across national borders, the WTO has a truly universal membership, and there is a common set of comprehensive trade rules.

The Ministerial should provide the impetus to address the built-in agenda that was reflected in the Uruguay Round agreements. For example, it was agreed to negotiate further liberalization in agriculture by 1999 and in services by the year 2000.

Canada would like to see the WTO begin work on other issues that are important to the trading system. These include investment and competition policy, which are not yet on the WTO agenda. Canada has been active in multilateral negotiations on investment with the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. And there are several sector-specific agreements that need to be reached such as in basic telecommunications and financial services.

Canada is committed to taking steps to help developing countries become better integrated into the trading system. To this end, Minister Eggleton has proposed a meeting in early 1997 of trade and aid agencies, international financial institutions, the WTO, and donor and recipient countries to improve the assistance to these countries vis-à-vis their integration into the world trading system.

Canada supports the negotiation of an Information Tech-

nology Agreement that would eliminate tariffs in a sector vital to economic growth. Building on this, we also support the elimination of tariffs in other sectors including pharmaceuticals, paper and wood products; oilseeds; and non-ferrous metals.

Canada strongly supports the need for a credible, solid WTO to ensure the smooth and fair operation of the world trading system. Being a trading nation, Canada has much to gain from a system that guarantees that all players have the opportunity to compete and succeed in the global marketplace. A successful and productive first WTO ministerial meeting will go a long way to maintaining the momentum that was built at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round.

Trade and Investment

Continued from page iii

economic environment that encourages Canadian firms to become more competitive and provides them with opportunities to enter new markets.

Exports are critical to Canada's economy. One in three jobs depends on exports and it is estimated that every \$1 billion of exports creates or sustains 11,000 jobs in Canada. Although Canada is a successful trading nation, some 100 companies account for 50 per cent of Canada's total exports. The

government's goal is to double the number of active Canadian exporters by the year 2000.

For Canada, which relies greatly on trade, as for all countries, secure access to world markets is critical. Canada needs an effective system of trade rules so Canadian firms can compete on equal terms in foreign markets. And it needs strong institutions like the World Trade Organization to enforce these rules fairly and effectively.