



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

CANADA

No. 48/32

CANADA'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

An address by the Honourable James A. MacKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, at the opening of the International Trade Fair, Toronto, May 29, 1948.

In the absence of my colleague, the Right Honourable C.D. Howe, and as Acting Minister of Trade and Commerce, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to this luncheon. This morning you have seen the results of efforts which have been expended over the past two years. The First Canadian International Trade Fair has become a living reality. The full measure of its success, of course, remains to be proven. Two weeks from now we will know something of the commercial relationships established and of the business transacted.

When we first contemplated this Trade Fair, it was conceived as a modest venture. Although a well-known institution in Europe, the Trade Fair is new on this side of the Atlantic. Before plans were very far under way, we were pleasantly surprised at the almost world-wide interest in this project. Manufacturers and producers not only in Canada but in many countries of the world are supporting this venture in a practical way. As a result we have today one of the world's great Trade Fairs. We hope it will be the first of a long line of fairs, not only in Canada, but in neighbouring countries as well.

I want to pay tribute to the truly splendid support the Department of Trade and Commerce of the Canadian Government has had from the Ontario Government, the City of Toronto, and the Canadian National Exhibition Association in organizing the Fair. We have also enjoyed, in full measure, the valuable co-operation of the representatives of other governments in Canada. Most important of all has been the assistance we have had from the associations of private industry, whose representatives are members of the Advisory Committee. This is truly a joint effort on the part of Government and industry. The result has exceeded our most optimistic expectations. It is a credit to a country of only 12½ million people.

This expansion is one of the most striking features of the Fair. Why have the exporters and traders of the world responded so readily to Canada's invitation? We shall find the answer, I think, if we ask what prompted the Government of Canada to sponsor the Fair, and if we ask why so many organizations represented here today are lending their whole-hearted support. Our common motive was, of course, to do what we could toward the restoration of trade among nations to the decent and historic basis of give-and-take. Our purpose was not entirely unselfish. Canada found herself, after the war, over-equipped with productive capacity by the standards of her pre-war trade. New outlets were urgently required to keep that capacity in operation; we could either maintain our place as a third trading nation, or else we could shut down half our shop, and in so doing reduce our industrial payrolls.

Our national character and individual faith in our country being what they are, there could be only one answer. Collectively, we chose progress rather than retreat; but progress involved two factors. The first was a return toward at least the measure of free international trade that existed before the war; the second was the dissemination throughout the world of the knowledge that Canada was newly equipped to enter industrial markets as both buyer and seller on a fairly heavy scale.

Toward the liberation of international trade, our representatives at Geneva and later at Havana have been striving vigorously and, I think, effectively. In the economic as in the diplomatic sphere, it is safe to say that Canada has played a part out of proportion to the size of her population.

In working toward the main purpose, these spokesmen of Canada were incidentally helping to achieve the secondary one of publicizing the nation's new industrial maturity. Similarly, trade commissioners throughout the world were endeavouring to interest businessmen in the increased potentialities of Canada as a source of supply and as a market. I need hardly add that these official efforts have been re-inforced by Canadian businessmen on tour, by the work of business organizations interested in foreign trade, and by the excellent export press which is developing so rapidly in Canada.

But it seemed to the Department of Trade and Commerce, and to the businessmen who, individually and collectively work closely with it, that there should be a more spectacular demonstration of Canada's eagerness both to stimulate world trade and to claim a fair share of it. The method approved after long consideration was nearly as old as trade itself and yet so new to the North American scene that it took on much of the nature of a gamble.

It was, of course, a Trade Fair -- a miniature of the great world of commerce; a centre where, for two weeks, businessmen of all countries could negotiate in the traditional freedom of the marketplace; where, more importantly, they could negotiate from face to face, buy and sell on the basis of samples which could be seen and handled. There, they could try to hurdle artificial barriers to trade; and, with experts readily available, could work out the complexities of exchange-rates and shipping routes and documentations.

To many of us, I think, the one chief appeal of the idea lay in the human element which is injected into the cold transaction of international trade. Instead of formal letters exchanged between strangers remote from one another in distance, race and language, there would be the personal contact which each of us realize to be the familiar, effective way of doing business. We can at least hope that association with future customers and suppliers will tell us something of the men with whom we hope to deal -- their methods, their problems, their way of thinking.

These, then, were our motives. If they were to be translated in a successful fair, then other men in other countries would have to feel much as we did. They would have to share our hopes for a restoration of trade, and our impatience with artificial restraints upon it. Like us, they would have to gamble on the feasibility of a Trade Fair in the New World; in the aggregate, their stake would be much greater than ours. We believed, when we laid our plans that there would be enough like-minded men, willing and able to come, to make a success of the fair. We had not anticipated the overwhelming response. It is, I suggest, an encouraging indication of man's desire to deal, peacefully and with mutual profit, with his neighbours.

I have said that our motives in organizing this fair were not entirely unselfish; but they were by no means concentrated upon immediate benefit for Canada. Any revival of trade between nations cannot fail to be of ultimate benefit to us. In such circumstances, it is not so important if the bulk of the business done during these next weeks is transacted between visitor and visitor rather than between visitor and Canadian. Canadians will get their share of sales, on their own merits, and place their share of orders, on the basis of their needs; but in any event our chief purpose will have been served and world trade will have been stimulated. We are content with our principal role of host, implying as it does the opportunity given to our guests to see our country, its industries and its products.

Further, we do not pretend to any copyright on the idea of an international Trade Fair. The interest expressed by other governments has been gratifying, and it is our hope that some at least of them on this side of the Atlantic will decide to hold, or encourage, trade fairs within their borders. A still greater number of exhibitors could be expected if the opportunity were given them to move their displays from fair to fair, without duplication of the initial expense.

Well, gentlemen, so far so good. We have worked well together to this stage; may I ask that for another two weeks this partnership of business and government continue to ensure the success of this First Canadian Trade Fair? Already, I realize, much has been done toward this end. The representatives of the business organizations and of the Department of Trade and Commerce will be in nearby offices in the Reception Centre, as counsellors to anyone who needs advice as to official or trade practice.

Can we not carry this a bit further? A moment ago, I referred to Canada as the host country. May I ask that each of the organizations represented here today translate this fact into a personal expression of welcome and good will on the part of himself and his associates?

In other words, let us, as individuals, as Canadians, as well-wishers for the Trade Fair, seek out visitors from other countries and make a point of extending to them some special and particular personal attention and courtesy. He may be an importer of fish or an exporter of rubber, and your line may be farm implements or textiles. But, as I have tried to show you -- his very presence at the fair indicates his community of interest with trade-minded Canadians. It indicates as well an interest in this country which is becoming a new force in world trade. Without question, he will want to know something about Canadians as people; that can be safely left to each of you. The benefits of such contacts and friendly meetings can be of first importance to each one of you and to Canada.

Gentlemen, I have an additional pleasure. On behalf of the Government of Canada, and especially on behalf of the Prime Minister and of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, I wish to thank you for your co-operation in bringing this First Canadian International Trade Fair so far on the road toward successful realization of all its purposes.

