

Autumn 1999 (September)

Millennium Trade Round

Conference notes the preparations for the forthcoming 'Millennium Round' of world trade negotiations, scheduled to begin in Seattle at the end of this year.

Conference believes:

- a) That the further removal of unnecessary barriers to trade and investment, regulated through an open and rules-based system based on principles of multilateral co-operation and non-discrimination, can contribute significantly to prosperity, employment and sustainable environmental protection.
- b) But that the World Trade Organisation and the trade agreements it oversees, as they currently operate, promote trade liberalisation at the expense of all other objectives, including environmental protection.
- c) That the Millennium Round must therefore be used to negotiate significant reforms to the WTO.

Conference calls on HM Government, working through the EU, to argue for:

1. Further reductions in trade barriers against developing country exports.
2. Agreement on global rules on investment, promoting non-discriminatory treatment of investors while not undermining international and national environmental, labour, health and consumer standards.
3. Agreements on trade and environment, permitting countries to discriminate against products produced by environmentally harmful processes, protecting environmental treaties against WTO challenge, and implementing a full sustainability review of all the agreements reached.
4. A reversal of the current burden-of-proof requirements for products posing potential dangers to health or the environment, requiring exporting countries to prove their exports' safety in case of dispute.
5. Further reductions in trade-distorting and environmentally damaging subsidies, particularly in agriculture, energy production, fisheries and timber.
6. A framework for global competition policy, ending abuses of power by transnational companies.
7. Reform of the WTO itself, to improve transparency and access to the general public, and to ensure that dispute panels cease to operate in isolation from other sources of international law.

Background briefing:

This motion updates existing party policy, consistent with the general approach set out in Policy Paper 12 *The Balance of Trade* (1995).

Conference voted to reject amendments to include references to human rights abuses and animal welfare in clause b). In addition Conference voted against amendments to encourage agreements on trade, labour standards and animal welfare which would permit countries to discriminate against products whose production processes involve unethical labour or animal welfare standards.