

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Edward A. Laing, *Introduction*, 4 Md. J. Int'l L. (1978).

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mjil/vol4/iss1/6>

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INTRODUCTION

*Edward A. Laing**

As the leaders of the major Western industrial countries have demonstrated several times in recent years, the Caribbean Basin is an ideal location for conferences. With its diverse social, economic and political systems and with the varied historical backgrounds of the countries, it is itself a fascinating subject for an interesting conference. For this reason, no doubt, it has been the subject of several recent conferences on a variety of international issues. We felt, however, that there was a need to treat in depth one aspect of international economic relations, *i.e.*, trade, which has been somewhat neglected recently. And we decided to do this against a background of diverse relevant issues.

In grouping together countries in and around the Caribbean Sea we were taking into account several basic similarities between the economies of the countries and the fact that, through the Economic System of Latin America (SELA) and in other fora such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), many of them have been taking similar policy positions in the "North-South" dialogue and have been chief architects of the "New International Economic Order." The prominence of these countries in those discussions and the universality of the economic problems which they and such trading partners as the United States face, convinced us that the Conference would have quite far-reaching significance. This was underscored by the currency of the Toyko Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations as well as by the pendency of negotiations between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the European Economic Community (EEC) for a new trade, aid and cooperation agreement to replace the 1975 Lomé Convention. In the spirit of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) this Convention makes provision, *inter alia*, for terms of trade which, at face value at least, favor the developing-country treaty parties — the ACP countries. Many have urged that the proximity of the Basin countries and their neighbors to the United States as well as the various linkages between them and this country justify improved economic relations with the United States. It has been thought that the Lomé model is one of the more viable range of alternatives to the defunct Alliance for Progress. Yet we noted that Caribbean Basin-United States economic relations leave much to be desired. And one important point which deminated our

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thinking was that the similarity of law and legal institutions in the English-speaking Caribbean Basin and the United States are factors which still have a great deal of unexplored potential.

With respect to the specific issues raised at the Conference, the GSP was probably discussed the most frequently, in view of its vast importance both to Caribbean Basin manufacturers and exporters, and to United States importers and investors. Largely on account of the smallness, uncompetitiveness and undiversified nature of most of the national economies in the Basin, regional policymakers have devoted much attention to constructing a sophisticated array of subregional institutions for economic integration, coordination, and ultimately, rationalization of the factors of production and their location, growth and output. Likewise, we decided to have an integrated discussion of the evolution of some of these institutions and of the patterns of trade intra-regionally, with the United States and between subregional units. This appears as Part I of these Papers. Topicality and importance were the chief factors which led to our selection of such issues as technology transfers, mineral resources, Cuban-United States trade prospects, problems with earnings from the crucial commodities of sugar and coffee, and subsidies and countervailing duty law. Our concern about the importance of improving the infrastructures indispensable for an efficient trading system led us to commission two papers — one on the need for specialized trade regulations in the Basin by Alan Ransom, and the other on law and development by Boris Kozolchyk.

Many of the papers and the discussion at the Conference went well beyond our expectations. Personally I deeply regret that the scarcity of funds which often bedevils undertakings such as these has prevented us from publishing a summary of the discussion. Among the many things discussed and which appear in these Papers, your attention is directed to a point made by Alan Ransom. He asserts that there is a need for greater aggressiveness by Caribbean Basin governments in lobbying and otherwise presenting their needs and views before regulatory and other agencies within the United States and other developed countries. Most of this appears in his paper, where, in addition, his comments on the *Pfizer* decision (regarding the right of foreign nations to sue in courts of the United States) provide much food for thought. Other important proposals are contained in Bryant Smith's two papers on export subsidies and countervailing duties, and on the GSP.

In my opinion, one of the more provocative papers is Hilbourne Watson's discussion of the internal and international social and economic dynamics of the Caribbean Basin countries. His approach, as a political

economist, adds novel perspectives to the broad-based coverage of the Conference. I found his discussion of the flow of labor from the Basin and its impact quite illuminating. So too are his comments on economic dependency, the deleterious effects on the Basin countries of capital inflows and the adequacy of the development models which have been utilized. His somewhat bleak view of the future and his call for the termination of what he calls imperialism and subimperialism are noteworthy; so are his criticisms of some of the problems created for themselves by countries within the region.

Hilbourne Watson's paper, along with that of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Shelton on United States policy towards the Caribbean, are good examples of the sort of balance which we attempted to achieve at the Conference. In our task of editing the Papers we have sought to express, as our speakers and other participants did so well at the Conference, the timely and contrapuntal nature of the many crucial problems affecting trade and other economic relations between the United States and its neighbors.

PAPERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CONFERENCE ON UNITED STATES-
CARIBBEAN BASIN TRADE: ECONOMIC AND LEGAL ASPECTS
(A REGIONAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN
SOCIETY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW)

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