

# Preface

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In the autumn of 1999 I was given a unique opportunity. The newly established Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade was looking for a means to raise its profile in the trade policy community and to gain a measure of academic credibility. I suggested that the centre sponsor an academic journal for which I would agree to be the founding editor. I firmly believed that a market niche existed for a multidisciplinary trade policy journal. This was just at the beginning of the era of electronic publishing and I was convinced that a credible online academic journal could be produced at a low cost relative to traditional print journals. I had also recently finished a term as editor for a print journal and had a number of ideas about how to shorten the publication process. It was agreed that the *Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy* would be launched in January 2000. To kick off the inaugural issue of the journal, I decided to write a short piece that I hoped would provide some background to the international trading system, yet be somewhat controversial so as to pique the interest of potential readers of the new journal. It was published under the heading of 'Editor's Pages'. I received considerable positive feedback from both colleagues and readers I was unacquainted with regarding my effort and decided that I would continue the practice of 'Editor's Pages' for each subsequent issue.

The *Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy* succeeded and by the end of 2009 the 20th issue (in ten volumes) had been published – and 20 'Editor's Pages' essays had been completed. Over the years I had continued to receive positive comments from reviewers, colleagues and the general readership regarding my essays. I had also used some of the essays as readings for graduate classes in my department of Bioresource Policy, Business and Economics, in the graduate class I provide as part of the Masters of International Trade (MIT) degree offered by the University of Saskatchewan and in various WTO capacity building courses offered around the world by the Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade. Over time, students in all of these courses have suggested that it would be useful to have the essays collected and published in one convenient place. This volume represents such a collection.

In writing these essays I had three main objectives: (1) to ensure the material was accessible to a wide audience; (2) to illustrate why institutional history is important for how current trade policy is made and; (3) to shed light

on how complex and difficult current issues in international trade policy can be – and thus why they are difficult to resolve. The second objective stems directly from my experience with students both in the university and among trade policy practitioners in capacity building training around the globe. Trade policy specialists may know the institutional history and how it may affect an issue in trade policy but they seldom write it down. Thus students have considerable difficulty in filling in the blanks when they begin to study trade policy issues.

When the *Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy* was launched in 2000 it was still a time of great optimism regarding the international trading system. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was still new and expectations for its potential to foster greater liberalisation were high. The Doha Round was yet to be launched and while there had been troubling demonstrations at the WTO's Ministerial Meeting in Seattle in 1999, these were seen as a one off – no one expected them to become a permanent feature at international trade meetings. The Doha Round was subsequently launched in 2001 with its explicit recognition of the role of trade policy in global development.

By the end of 2009 any optimism regarding the efficacy of the international trade institutions was long gone. The Doha Round lies in tatters and there appears to be neither the political will to complete it nor to let it die. Conflicts abound among WTO Members, particularly between developing and developed countries as well as between governments and some members of civil society – environmentalists, consumers, animal rights activists, labour standards advocates, etc. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 security concerns have often taken precedence over open trade. Climate change has become a major international policy issue and a sanctioning role for trade is being contemplated in a number of quarters. With no discernable progress in the WTO multilateral negotiations, interest in regional and preferential trade agreements has expanded – but so has the realisation that these are forums where unequal bargaining power is largely unchecked and where any advantage in market access may be transitory – eroded in the trading partner's next regional agreement.

It is in light of these developments that the title for this book was chosen – *Conflict, Chaos and Confusion*. The current conflicts are obvious for all to see. There is no apparent way forward out of the current antagonistic climate – in the absence of any constructive initiatives the system appears chaotic. Everyone, from seasoned trade policy veterans to domestic politicians, to business people engaging in international transactions, to voters, seem confused and apprehensive given the complexity of the problems brought by globalisation. Over a decade the international trading system has gone from one that was imbued with considerable optimism to one in deep crisis. This book

attempts to shed light on both the major issues confronting the international trading system and their complexity. It offers few suggestions for solving the crisis but hopefully provides insights that can inform the debate and discount some of the simplistic solutions that are all too often proffered. Hopefully, it also assists in developing a healthy respect for the persistence and resourcefulness of protectionists among those venturing into the trade policy arena for the first time. Many of those who wish to harness international trade institutions to broader social objectives fail to comprehend that much can be at risk from an alliance with those having vested interests.

Of course, bringing a book to fruition takes many hands. I would like to thank James Leach, Executive Director of the Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade for his initial enthusiasm and long-term support of the *Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*. I have had a number of excellent technical assistants over the years in the journal's office – Shari Boyd, Laura Loppacher, Desaree Larsen and David Hutchinson. I have also benefitted from the wisdom and skill of Leona Theis who has been the technical editor since the journal's inception. David Hutchinson's assistance with the preparation of this book is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Jo Betteridge and the rest of the excellent team at Edward Elgar for their hard work in moving the process from proposal to manuscript to published book.

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