Heffernan Says:

Bretton Woods and Wooden Money

Testifying before the House Banking and Currency Committee in Washington, W. Randolph Burgess, president of the American Bankers Association, said, "The greatest danger in this thing, we being a mercurial people, is that we might start by being Uncle Sucker and end up by being Uncle Shylock."

He was discussing the Bretton Woods monetary measures—the $8,800,000,000 International Monetary Fund and the $9,100,000,000 International Bank.

That was a financier's view of this stupendous adventure in deficit financing. Now let us consider a labor man's opinion. I do not mean one of the modern horny-handed gentlemen in a high hat and striped trousers on the way to a sociological luncheon conference. I mean a chap in a khaki blouse who drives a truck and carries a union card and gets $10 a day.

This labor man said he knew Mr. Burgess was one of the "big money guys" but—and it's a real bread and butter "but"—Burgess had said a mouthful. My friend on the truck said he himself was no economist, but he had a congenital aversion to wooden money and Bretton Woods looked like wooden money to him. He said he had read these figures and started to do a little pencil work.

There had been much talk, he declared, about the number of man-hours lost in strikes but he had taken $1,000,000,000 and figured out that at $10 a day the loss on $1,000,000,000 of public money wasted meant 100,000,000 man-days. And he advised me to figure what it would mean if we should get the same deal we got the last time when we put $20,000,000,000 of income taxpayers' money in the global jackpot.

"I'd be willing to help the folks in other countries," he said, "but this Bretton Woods business look like a phony to me. I can see myself and others like me taking a walk into those woods as a free American and coming out at the other side as something on the economic level of a serf. And that's not what my son and other men's sons are fighting this war for."

Hasn't my friend on the truck something there?