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World Meeting On Economics Seen Favored

But Multilateral Program on Trade Problems Awaits Action on Other Issues

By Max Forester

Sentiment in favor of a world economic conference to settle multilaterally some of the pressing issues of world trade was expressed in both Great Britain and the United States last week amid uncertainties created principally by three factors:

(1) Certain steps, toward implementing the Dumbarton Oaks agreement as to the necessity for an economic and social council may be taken at San Francisco. Although nobody knows exactly what any government plans to propose as to the ultimate form of the council, it is held in some quarters that it should be endowed with authority to investigate world economic problems, to provide some means of reconciling divergent viewpoints, and, possibly of adjudicating disputes.

(2) Opinion is generally held that the Bretton Woods agreements must be passed on by the nations which participated in framing them, prior to any general exploration of economic questions.

Moves for Economic Parley

(3) Various regional economic difficulties which press for an early solution, some to a greater degree than others, and which depend partly on the course of the war, have presented themselves. In the forefront of these are (a) the question of post-VE-Day trading agreements between Great Britain and the United States; (b) the possible need of settling purely European trade questions through some kind of regional economic commission; and (c) the scheduled continuance of inter-American discussions in June.

The recurrence of agitation for an over-all world economic conference was perhaps more significant as an indication of the general belief that far-reaching multilateral action must eventually be taken in the field of world trade, than as a sign of any actually impending event.

The idea of a new economic conference first took on definite shape at Bretton Woods as representatives of the United States and British delegations gave correspondents to understand that a subsequent conference would be held to explore trade questions, as against money questions. This rumor was circulated widely at the international business conference at Rye, N. Y., and formed the basis on which representatives of fifty-two nations present their confidently enunciated principles to be followed in tariff, credit and related matters.

"Would Be Advisable"

A fortnight ago, in answer to specific queries by this newspaper, the State Department denied that there were any plans for such a conference. Only last week, however, Will Clayton, Assistant Secretary of State, told the House Banking Committee that he, for one, favored holding a world trade meeting.

Questioned by Representative Jesse Wolcott, Republican, of Michigan, one of the American delegates of Bretton Woods, as to the necessity for the parley, Mr. Clayton declared: "I would think there would be a world trade conference and that it would be advisable." He agreed with Mr. Wolcott that the conference should include China, Russia, Britain and France and the United States.

At about the same time, Captain Leonard D. Gammans, M. P., a recent visitor in this country, told the American Chamber of Commerce in London that, in his belief, a conference on international trade, similar to the Crimean conference on political and military matters, was desirable.

Grand strategy had taken shape, meanwhile, on one of the most important questions that would face the hypothetical conference conferred, as Mr. Churchill in a speech a fortnight ago upheld Britain's position in maintaining a solid empire bloc in economic discussions, and as State Department spokesmen pressed our Congress for drastic downward revisions of United States tariffs.

The possibility that a deal might be reached between the United States and Britain involving some adjustment in the British position with regard to empire preference in exchange for tariff concessions on our part is suggested as the key to this situation.

In foreign trade quarters it is considered significant in this connection that the San Francisco conference, the inter-American economic conference and the introduction of Bretton Woods legislation have all pushed ahead of the end of June, when the reciprocal trade question is due to be reviewed in Congress.