

Negotiations For Free Trade Are Near A Critical Stage

By KEN METHERAL
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LONDON (CP)—For Whitehall officials, the dream of a European trade area is disturbed these nights by alphabetical nightmares in which OEEC, EPU and NATO disintegrate in a meaningless jumble.

Negotiations for free trade on a wide scope are rapidly approaching the critical stage. Just how much basis there is for the British fears will likely be known next month.

Whitehall is worried that its proposal for a 17-nation free trade area is not finding favor with the already-established six-nation common market, linking France, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg.

CONCERNS CANADA
Failure to break the threatened impasse could mark a grave turning in the development not only of European trade but of European unity, in the eyes of the British.

And the problem extends overseas to Canada and other Commonwealth countries, since Commonwealth preference in trade enters into the debate.

Ministers of the common market countries now are tentatively scheduled to meet in Brussels May 10 to formulate counter-proposals to the British plan. It is expected that the ministerial group of the larger OEEC—the Organization for European Economic Co-operation—may then be able to meet late in May to consider any new developments.

Actually, all this was to have started in April, but was delayed by the French political crisis.

Under the British plan, the free trade area would embrace the common market countries and also the United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. It would include 250,000,000 customers.

The common market plan calls for abolition of all tariffs among the six members within 15 years. A first 10-per-cent cut becomes effective at the end of this year.

It was 10 years ago that president Harry Truman signed the Economic Co-operation Act that brought Marshall aid into being and boosted hopes of European unity.

The result was the establishment of OEEC, which grew beyond its first functions into an organization formulating trade policies. Then came the European Payments Union which re-established the transferability of European currencies.

The British fear that if the common market goes ahead on its own, it will throw the present European trade arrangements out of balance. Said one government official:

"OEEC and EPU are based on non-discrimination and fair shares all around. The two may not be able to stand the strain of a common market that is not linked to the rest of Europe by a free trade area."

Many Britons believe that not even the NATO alliance could withstand the disruptive effect of a lone common market. The Manchester Guardian, in a typical comment, says the alliance is

so that it appears to be caused more by misunderstanding than basic differences.

France and Italy, the most intransigent of the common market countries, are unwilling to forego protection for their industries from competition outside the common market area except as part of a larger political project.

The French Assembly, in fact, would probably never have ratified the common market treaty as a purely economic document.

It was accepted as the price to be paid for Franco-German understanding and greater European unity.

British reluctance immediately after the Second World War to become directly involved in the coal-steel community and similar projects has made the common market countries regard the new British proposal as a straight commercial proposition.

CHANGED OUTLOOK
But British opinion has under-

gone a rapid change in the last few years. Says The Guardian: "Free trade is a political concept to British people. In this country the proposal to sweep away trade barriers within Western Europe now is being taken to mean a great deal more than a trade deal."

There is also considerable misunderstanding of Britain's role in the Commonwealth preference system, the European tendency being to regard the system as

purely for Britain's benefit.

Britain, in fact, gives counterbalancing preferences to Commonwealth goods, preferences the common market countries may well be unwilling to match.

Under the British free trade plan, the United Kingdom would follow common market example in abolishing restrictions with her partners.

But Britain would retain protection for her own farmers and also preferences for Common-

Would Regulate Labor Unions

MONTREAL (CP)—H. J. Clawson, director of industrial relations for the Steel Company of Canada, Ltd., said Wednesday labor unions should be regulated to protect the interests of the wealth agricultural products. European nations, particularly France, object strenuously to this.

By law at least as effectively as any other private groups.

Speaking at the Canadian Textile Conference, he said continuation of existing legal immunities for unions will only hasten the decline of union prestige and influence.

Text of his speech was released to the press in advance of delivery.

Mr. Clawson said restrictive laws should be adopted only if the interests of society as a whole

are considered. He urged greater enforcement of laws on picketing and secondary boycotts. Picketing, he said, is legal only as a way of publicly proclaiming a grievance and soliciting voluntary help.

In fact almost all picket lines attempted to prevent other people from entering a plant.

He also asked that unions be held accountable in court for actions detrimental to the public good.

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