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The Paris Conference

THE resolutions of the Allies' Economic Conference held a few days ago at Paris, at which Canada and Australia were represented, express in a very general way the determination of the Allies to co-operate after the war in promoting trade between the Allied nations, and to guard against enemy countries obtaining any trade control that would prejudice the interests of the Allies. It seems to have been hastily assumed by some writers in the English press, and by some correspondents of Canadian journals, that the whole matter has been happily settled, and an after-the-war trade programme agreed upon to the satisfaction of all concerned. Reports alleged to have emanated from Sir George E. Foster, who attended the Conference, are thus summed up in the London (Ontario), Free Press:

"Sir George E. Foster, Canadian Minister of Trade and Commerce, who attended the economic conference of the Allies held in Paris, has returned to London with some significant statements. The most important of these is the unanimity which prevailed, and the fact that it was found possible to lay down definite principles governing the varied interests of the countries concerned, including those of the friendly neutrals. It is apparent from what Sir George states that no narrow and 'middle-of-the-war' sentiment prevailed. There was no anger manifested toward the enemy countries. No spirit of revenge is actuating the Allies in their economic purposes. But there is a definite determination among them to prevent the aggressive German economic campaign which made itself felt before the war from regaining the place that it held. The Allies will stand together in their trading, with the expressed object of rendering it impossible for Germany to again build up a commercial power that in turn will permit of the peace of the world being threatened by the Teutons. The Allies are acting with a view to their own protection, and not with vindictiveness."

It would be well to await some more authoritative statement of Sir George Foster's views before assuming the correctness of this report. There is, of course, among all the countries represented at the Conference the most earnest desire to co-operate for the purposes of the war. Naturally there will be a desire to promote the best relations between them after the war, and particularly to guard against the German aim of commercial domination. On the policy to be pursued while the war lasts, there will be little room for difference, for all theories and systems must yield to the demands which the war has created.

When the Allied nations are called on at this time to declare a policy to take effect after the war they can hardly do more than express a pious resolve to stand together as far as possible. This, it appears, is what they have done at Paris in the resolutions which we publish to-day.

A Berlin telegram represents the German authorities as saying that the resolutions of the Paris Conference are of no importance, because the trade relations that are to prevail between Germany and her present enemies will be determined in the treaty of peace. That observation would have more justification if Germany were likely to be in a position to dictate the terms of peace. But even when they are cheered by an occasional bit of military success, the German official class must by this time realize that, though the day of peace may not be near, when it comes the Allies and not Germany will dictate the terms on which the war shall end. The loss of the trade position she had gained, and the hostility of the Allies to German trade projects for many years to come, are among the penalties that Germany must pay for the crimes she has committed. The interests of Germany, the wishes of Germany, in these things, will be of the least importance when the peace treaty is made. There may, however, be grave difficulties in the Allies coming to an agreement among themselves as to what is the best line of policy to accomplish the purpose which they all have in mind. There is no class of question upon which there is keener controversy than that which relates to fiscal policy. That differences of that character should be laid aside during the war can easily be understood. But it would be too much to expect that an immediate agreement could be reached on such questions, to apply for the years after the war. There will undoubtedly be wide differences of opinion in England as to the policy to be adopted. Difficulty there may be also from the point of view of some of the Allied nations. An eminent French writer lately quoted advanced the view that France would hereafter expect to receive in the British Overseas Dominions the same tariff treatment as Great Britain. Any attempt to settle these questions now would be doomed to failure, and would be a cause of division among people who should now be united for the great purposes of the war.

If there are people in Canada who, relying on the cabled report above quoted, think these vexed questions have been settled, they will do well to remember that from the beginning it was clearly understood that the Paris Conference would have no power to settle them. Because of the tone of some of the articles in the press and some of the not too discreet speeches of Premier Hughes, of Australia, there was a little anxiety in England concerning the purposes of the Conference. In the House of