

The Commercial

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CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN STATES.

The convention of American states engineered by Secretary Blaine, of the United States, is attracting a great deal of attention and comment in Great Britain and Europe. The European nations which do a large trade with Mexico and the South American republics, naturally feel a little nervous over the prospect of the formation of a commercial union arrangement between the countries interested in the conference. Great Britain especially, as the nation having the largest trade with the southern American republics, is deeply exercised over the holding of the conference. It is recognized that should Secretary Blaine's designs be successfully carried to any considerable extent, the United States would be given great advantages over other countries in its trade relationship with the southern republics. However, it is more than likely that greater importance is being attached to this conference of American states than will be warranted by the results likely to be achieved. There are a number of questions which may be considered to advantage by the delegates of the various countries interested, but it is not at all probable that any arrangement will be made, which will give the United States any advantage over European countries, in trade matters. The interests involved are too vast and diversified to render such a result at all probable. Besides, the South American republics are not noted for the stability of their governments, and were an arrangement entered into on the lines laid down, it would not likely be continued in force for any length of time. The southern republics are also proportionably as largely interested in their trade relations with other countries as with the United States, and there is no affinity in language, race, religion, etc., which would lead them to favor the country named at the expense of other nations with which they are on friendly terms.

The London *Chamber of Commerce Journal* submits statistics which show the value of trade between Great Britain and ten American republics, as compared with the trade of the United States with the same countries. The countries named are Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chili, Brazil, Uruguay and the Argentine Republic. To these ten countries Great Britain sends merchandise to the value of £22,480,363, and imports in return goods to the amount of £14,746,129. The United States exports £7,283,955 worth of goods to these countries and imports from the same source to the value of £20,271,223. The total export and import trade of Great Britain with these nations is, therefore, thirty-seven million pounds sterling, against a total trade with the United States of about twenty-seven and a half million.

The journal from which these figures are taken seems to incline to the belief that the Imperial Federation scheme for the British Empire has caused the United States to take action leading to the conference of American

States. The argument is that a complete federation of the British Empire would exert a powerful influence upon the United States. The *Chamber of Commerce Journal* says:—

It is quite possible that the Government of the United States has been influenced by the results of the late Colonial Conference in London, the effects of which are clearly visible in Australia. A federation of the British Empire would exert an irresistible moral influence on our kinsmen of the United States, and might even place them under the necessity of participating in such a union of the English-speaking races. The Government of Washington may, conceivably, be conscious of the risk of this contingency, and be desirous of anticipating such an eventuality by pre-arranging another solution. It may also, on the other hand, be actuated solely by business motives, and desirous only of attracting to it, by a wise policy, the political and economic sympathies of neighboring governments. It may only be seeking to effect an extension of the Monroe doctrine to South as well as North America, and to change its formula so as to read 'the Americas for the Americans.'

This Imperial Federation idea is a new one here, but one which does not carry much force. The objects sought through the conference are no doubt to establish relationship beneficial to the trade of the United States first, though of course a show is made that it is to be for the mutual interest of all concerned. 'America for the Americans' is the main idea, to the exclusion of foreign countries, and this means very largely 'America for the United States.' The *Chamber of Commerce Journal* further thinks that a federation of the British Empire will be facilitated, "should practical results, even of an incomplete character, follow from the conference of American states."

Following are the several questions which constitute the programme of the conference:—

1. Measures that shall tend to preserve the peace and promote the prosperity of the several American states.
2. Measures toward the formation of an American Customs Union, under which the trade of the American nations with each other shall, so far as possible and profitable, be promoted.
3. The establishment of regular and frequent communication between the ports of the several American states and the ports of each other.
4. The establishment of a uniform system of customs regulations in each of the independent American states to govern the mode of importation and exportation of merchandise and port dues and charges, a uniform method of determining the classification and valuation of such merchandise in the ports of each country, and a uniform system of invoices, and the subject of the sanitation of ships and quarantines.
5. The adoption of a uniform system of weights and measures and laws to protect the patent rights, copyrights, and trade-marks of citizens of either country in the other, and for the extradition of criminals.
6. The adoption of a common silver coin, to be issued by each Government, the same to be legal tender in all commercial transactions between the citizens of all the American states.
7. An agreement upon, and recommendation for adoption to their respective Governments of a definite plan of arbitration of all questions, disputes, or differences that may now or hereafter exist between them, to the end that all difficulties and disputes between such nations may be peaceably settled and wars prevented.

One point worthy of note is the vast extent of the interests involved. The population of the various nations represented at the conference aggregate 120,000,000, and cover nearly

12,000,000 square miles of territory. This is about three times the area of all the countries of Europe, and if as densely peopled as Europe, would have a population of over one billion.

REDUCING HOURS OF LABOR.

The Knights of Labor, at their recent convention at Atlanta, Georgia, have wisely decided not to adopt extreme measures in their efforts to reduce the working day to eight hours. General Master Powderly said on the one hand that he did not advocate reduction of the hours of toil as the cure-all and the end of the struggle of the order, but merely as a means to an end. On the other hand, he declared that he was not hostile to the idea of an eight-hour day. It was his deep concern in the movement, he said, which prevented him from sanctioning what he regarded as unwise or foolhardy methods in hastening it. He suggested that the order should endeavor to bring about a reduction of the hours of labor in so gradual a way as not to disarrange business or in any way work hardship to either side in the controversy. One plan which he recommended contemplated the reduction of the working day by half an hour each year until the eight hour limit should be reached.

With the Knights the American Federation of Labor appears also to agree. At their convention, the Knights received a communication from the president of the Federation of Labor, stating that they were opposed to a general strike in the interest of the eight-hour movement, but would endeavor to introduce the movement in certain trades where the conditions were favorable. The Knights passed resolutions "declaring that they coincided with the view of the Federation men that no general strike should be inaugurated on May 1, 1890, but that the movement should be confined to such trades as are in condition to put the plan in operation on that date, and calling upon the president of the Federation to indicate the trades organized within that association which are prepared to successfully inaugurate the eight-hour movement on the date indicated, promising that the Knights will give their moral support to the movement by those trades."

This decision on the part of the leaders of organized labor is a very wise one. If the desired end can be brought about gradually and without any great disturbances, it will be very much better for all concerned. The tendency of the times seems to be decidedly in the direction of reducing the number of hours comprising a working day. By judicious agitation no doubt this tendency can be increased and accelerated. A general strike to enforce the eight hour system immediately in all lines of trade would be a most serious matter, and the successful issue of such a strike would be very doubtful. Even if the movement could be enforced, such a radical measure could not but bring about great disturbances in the commercial condition of the country. There are certain lines of trade in which the conditions are more favorable to a shortening of the time of labor, and by securing a reduction of the length of a day's work in these branches of industry, substantial headway will be made,