

FREE TRADE WITH EUROPE ?

With communication between countries half-a-world apart (nowadays no more than a matter of hours) the shrinking world makes nonsense of frontiers, forms ever larger units, compels new thinking along the economic front. From capital to capital, airliners cross national boundaries without passengers being aware of it; expanding trade boggles at tariffs, duties and the customs house. Hence the growing, insistent demand for Free Trade in Europe.

At Church House, discussion of the European Free Trade idea was opened by Mr. Heathcote Amory. That veteran statesman, Robert Schuman (France) gave to the Conference the benefit of long international experience. As an observer, came the Duke of Edinburgh. 15 countries including Britain, joined in the frank discussion.

As the Chancellor addressed the Conference, Pathe News sought the opinion of his predecessor, Mr. Peter Thurnycroft.

America largely owes her great development to free trade within her boundaries; half a continent with no customs barriers no tariffs. Russia enjoys similar advantages. And so, under the proposed Free Trade Scheme, would Western Europe, now restricted and hopelessly out of step with mid-twentieth Century trade requirements. The tariff walls of Europe virtually condemn 100-mile an hour trade to crawl at an out-of-date thirty.

Six countries have taken the first steps towards abolishing their economic frontiers, and formed the European Common Market. In Rome met statesmen of France, Italy, Western Germany, Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg. Over a maximum period of 15 years they will reduce, and eventually abolish trade barriers between themselves, and at the same time maintain a common tariff against the world outside. Eleven other countries may follow their example, though maintaining their individual tariffs. The paper board industry very strongly opposes joining the European Free Trade Area. Deprived of its tariffs it fears that foreign competition would drive it out of business. The textile industries take the same view.

Emphatically, textile tycoon Cyril Lord denounced the proposed Free Trade Area:

Agriculture would remain exempt from the rigours of Free Trade, even if Britain joined the European Area. Consuming more good than we grow, ourselves, we give preference to imports from the Commonwealth, which takes our manufacturers in return. Poultry farmers already face the severe competition of Denmark; so do dairy and pig farmers. But with agriculture left out, and with two sections of manufacturers in opposition, no less than 80 per cent of British industry believes the European Free Trade Area will bring home the bacon of increased prosperity.

To hear what Britain stands to gain, listen again to Mr. Thorneycroft.

What will come into Britain free of duty, whether we join or stay out of the Continental scheme. Preference to produce of the Commonwealth will continue. 80% of British industry believes that greater prosperity will be ours if we become a member of the Free Trade Area.