

CONGRESSMAN IS OPTIMISTIC OVER McDONALD'S U. S. VISIT

By CHARLES P. STEWART
 Washington Staff Writer

Washington, July 2.—Chairman Fred A. Britten of the house of representatives' committee on naval affairs estimates the average batch of diplomatic notes concerning international armament limitation is written on a "rather less, because it spoils the paper."

Britten in a Chicagoan looks forward hopefully toward the expected Washington visit of Ramsay MacDonald, England's new labor premier, to discuss with President Hoover the chances for an Anglo-American agreement on equalization of the two countries' fleets of war craft.

"Professional agitators? Adly experts? No," says Chairman Britten. "They never will accomplish anything. However, President Hoover and Premier MacDonald? Both of them. Each committed to an economy program. It sounds promising."

Long known as an ultra-"navy man," Representative Britten seems to me to be one of the most effective, practical toilers in this country in the peace vineyard—the sea-peace vineyard, anyway. Quite candidly, he has held the view that England's governments—except for a while, a few years ago, when the Laborites were briefly in power once before—have remained determined to rule the oceans, as often as a wartime show-down made it seem desirable to John Bull to exercise his authority.

To the Chicagoan this has appeared like a constant threat of Anglo-American trouble—because he is convinced that never again is Uncle Sam going to submit tamely to John Bull's maritime dictation.

Plenty of people argue that a

mighty navy really is peace insurance. "The navy," they say, "navies are not likely to tackle a fleet which they know can beat them."

Britten's remarks have suggested such a line of reasoning.

Yet between his idea and the jincoes there always has been this difference—

"Britten's notion has been to build warships so fast—Uncle Sam can do it if he likes, having billions more money than the English—that John Bull cannot keep up." Thus the sea will be freed to American shipping in spite of England—and then Britten thinks the latter will be glad enough to accept mutual armament reduction to a minimum.

What hitherto has made a binding Anglo-American "freedom of the seas" compact so difficult would be the extraordinary slipperiness of British diplomacy.

Just before he retired in 1909 President Roosevelt imagined he had closed a satisfactory bargain in the "Declaration of London," but the English government found an excuse for calling it off when the World war broke out. President Wilson howled, but the British had the bigger navy, so Mr. Wilson had only his protests for his pains.

The Chicago congressman's conclusion is that a naval agreement with England is not worth much unless she keeps it at the same time—or a little beforehand, preferably.

President Harding, through Secretary of State Hughes, tried it on the latter basis—agreeing and reducing simultaneously—in 1921-22, and the English took that trick, too.

It was so neat that Americans hardly understand yet how their overseas cousins, who were being badly outbatted by the United States at the war's end, flinched and the gulleible Yankee confereed into sinking several hundred million dollars' worth of Uncle Sam's newest armored ships and returning England's naval superiority to her—while apparently putting the two fleets on a 50-50 footing.

The dieker looks perfectly fair on paper to this day—but compare the fleets!

What wonder Navy Chairman Britten is suspicious!

He not only suspects England's diplomats, as too slick for safety; he likewise suspects America's as unscrupulous enough to give away everything maritime that Uncle Sam has left.

Once he even attempted to take the whole question out of the experts' hands, by starting a man-to-man talk with Commander J. M. Kenworthy, who fills a position in parliament somewhat similar to Britten's own in congress—who agrees with Britten that Anglo-American naval relations are drifting dangerously, and is in accord with Britten in wanting to stop it.

This plan did not work either. Secretary of State Kellogg was so much niffed at the suggested departure from orthodox diplomatic methods that he dug up an old law which threatened Britten with jail unless he forebore.

"Premier MacDonald," says the Chicagoan, "seems to me likelier to mean what he says concerning our two navies than any official Englishman we have discussed them with thus far."

"I believe we can take him seriously—and trust him."

"True, his predecessor, Stanley Baldwin, also was a civilian; but Baldwin's affliations with the British ruling class were closer—with the king, the admiralty and professional officialdom."

"MacDonald and the admiralty may even be a trifle unfriendly. I hope so."

"Prospects are excellent, in the circumstances," added the congressman, "that the naval conference of 1931, when the present pact expires, will be prevented from falling under the diplomats' control."

That should mean agreement on a basis of equity which will guarantee freedom of the seas.

"In turn, that will mean armament reduction, of course."

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