

FDR's Bretton Woods Plan

Here are excerpts President Franklin Roosevelt's Feb. 12, 1945 message to Congress on the creation of the Bretton Woods system.

In my budget message of Jan. 9, I called attention to the need for immediate action on the Bretton Woods proposals for an international monetary fund and an international bank for reconstruction and development. It is my purpose in this message to indicate the importance of these international organizations in our plans for a peaceful and prosperous world.

As we dedicate our total efforts to the task of winning this war, we must never lose sight of the fact that victory is not only an end in itself but, in a large sense, victory offers us the means of achieving the goal of lasting peace and a better way of life. . . .

If we are to measure up to the task of peace with the same stature as we have measured up to the task of war, we must see that the institutions of peace rest firmly on the solid foundations of international political and economic cooperation. The cornerstone for international political cooperation is the Dumbarton Oaks proposal for a permanent United Nations.

International political relations will be friendly and constructive, however, only if solutions are found to the difficult economic problems we face today. The cornerstone for international economic cooperation is the Bretton Woods proposals for an international monetary fund and an international bank for reconstruction and development.

These proposals for an international fund and international bank are concrete evidence that the economic objectives of the United States agree with those of the United Nations. They illustrate our unity of purpose and interest in the economic field. What we need and what they need correspond—expanded production, employment, exchange, and consumption—in other words, more goods produced, more jobs, more trade,

and a higher standard of living for us all.

To the people of the United States, this means real peacetime employment for those who will be returning from the war and for those at home whose wartime work has ended. It also means orders and profits to our industries and fair prices to our farmers. We shall need

prosperous markets in the world to insure our own prosperity, and we shall need the goods the world can sell us. For all these purposes, as well as for a peace that will endure, we need the partnership of the United Nations.

The first problem in time which we must cope with, is that of saving life and getting resources and people back into production. In many of the liberated countries, economic life has all but stopped. Transportation systems are in ruins, and therefore coal and raw materials cannot be brought to factories.

Many factories themselves are shattered, power plants smashed, transmission systems broken, bridges blown up or bombed, ports clogged with sunken wrecks, and great rich areas of farm land inundated by the sea. People are tired and sick and hungry. But they are eager to go to work again, and to create again with their own hands and under their own leaders the necessary physical basis of their lives.

Emergency relief is under way behind the armies under the authority of local Governments, backed up first by the Allied Military Command and after that by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Our participation in the UNRRA has been approved by Congress. But neither UNRRA nor the armies are designed for the construction or reconstruction of large-scale public works or factories or power plants or transportation systems. That job must be done otherwise, and it must be started soon.

The main job of restoration is not one of relief. It is one of reconstruction which must largely be done by local people and their Governments. They will provide the labor, the local money, and most of the materials. The same is true for all the many plans for the improvement of transportation, agriculture, industry, and housing, that are essential to the development of the economically backward areas of the world.

But some of the things required for all these proj-



ects, both of reconstruction and development, will have to come from overseas. It is at this point that our highly developed economy can play a role important to the rest of the world and very profitable to the United States. Inquiries for numerous materials and for all kinds of equipment and machinery in connection with such projects are already being directed to our industries, and many more will come. This business will be welcome just as soon as the more urgent production for the war itself ends.

The main problem will be for these countries to obtain the means of payment. In the long run we can be paid for what we sell abroad chiefly in goods and services. But at the moment many of the countries who want to be our customers are prostrate. Other countries have devoted their economies so completely to the war that they do not have the resources for reconstruction and development.

Unless a means of financing is found, such countries will be unable to restore their economies and, in desperation, will be forced to carry forward and intensify existing systems of discriminatory trade practices, restrictive exchange controls, competitive depreciation of currencies, and other forms of economic warfare. That would destroy all our good hopes. We must move promptly to prevent its happening, and we must move on several fronts, including finance and trade.

The United States should act promptly upon the plan for the international bank, which will make or guarantee sound loans for the foreign currency requirements of important reconstruction and development projects in member countries. One of its most important functions will be to facilitate and make secure wide private participation in such loans. The articles of agreement constituting the charter of the bank have been worked out with great care by an international conference of experts and give adequate protection to all interests. I recommend to the Congress that we accept the plan, subscribe the capital allotted to us, and participate wholeheartedly in the bank's work.

This measure, with others I shall later suggest, should go far to take care of our part of the lending requirements of the post-war years. They should help the countries concerned to get production started, to get over the first crisis of disorganization and fear, to begin the work of reconstruction and development; and they should help our farmers and our industries to get over the crisis of reconversion by making a large volume of export business possible in the post-war years. . . .

As confidence returns, private investors will participate more and more in foreign lending and investment without any Government assistance. But to get over the first crisis, in the situation that confronts us, loans and guarantees by agencies of Government will be essential.

We all know, however, that a prosperous world economy must be built on more than foreign investment. Exchange rates must be stabilized and the channels of trade opened up throughout the world. A large foreign trade after victory will generate production, and therefore wealth. It will also make possible the servicing of foreign investments. . . .

A good start has been made. The United Nations monetary conference at Bretton Woods has taken a long step forward on a matter of great practical importance to us all. The conference submitted a plan to create an international monetary fund which will put an end to monetary chaos. The fund is a financial institution to preserve stability and order in the exchange rates between different moneys. It does not create a single money for the world; neither we nor anyone else is ready to do that. There will still be a different money in each country, but with the fund in operation, the value of each currency in international trade will remain comparatively stable. Changes in the value of foreign currencies will be made only after careful consideration by the fund of the factors involved. . . .

[The whole package of measures] is our hope for a secure and fruitful world, a world in which plain people in all countries can work at tasks which they do well, exchange in peace the products of their labor, and work out their several destinies in security and peace; a world in which Governments, as their major contribution to the common welfare, are highly and effectively resolved to work together in practical affairs and to guide all their actions by the knowledge that any policy or act that has effects abroad must be considered in the light of those effects.

This point in history at which we stand is full of promise and of danger. The world will either move toward unity and widely shared prosperity or it will move apart into necessarily competing economic blocs.

We have a chance, we citizens of the United States, to use our influence in favor of a more united and cooperating world. Whether we do so will determine, as far as it is in our power, the kind of lives our grandchildren can live.