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A Far Eastern Economic Conference

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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2/17/56

A FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC CONFERENCE

There are two ways to deal with problems of foreign policy. One is to do nothing about them until the pressures mount to the breaking point and then rush in with hastily-conceived and usually costly attempts to save a situation. The other is to try to anticipate difficulties and take remedial action in a more rational and timely fashion.

I happen to believe in the second approach. That is one of the reasons why I have repeatedly advocated the convening of a Far Eastern Economic Conference. The purpose of such a conference would be to face frankly and fully, and in concert with all the nations involved, the economic difficulties that exist in that area. There are, for example, problems of economic development common to all Far Eastern countries. There are also problems of the trade in rice and other agricultural commodities which are beginning to glut the international markets.

Most of all there are the economic realities confronting Japan. Sooner or later the United States and other nations with interests in the Far East are going to have to face the fact that these realities are building pressures in Japan that have dangerously explosive potentialities.

The Japanese people number 90 million. Their islands scarcely equal in total area the size of my State of Montana, where there are only 640,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, only 16 percent of the Japanese land area is arable.

The Japanese cannot support themselves on the meager natural resources of their islands. They do have, however, a great supply of modern technological skills. They have also been for many decades the leading fishermen of the Western Pacific. What this means, then, is that they must literally fish and trade on a substantial level or face starvation. Unfortunately, they have been able to do neither very satisfactorily since the end of World War II.

The communist nations and South Korea have drawn barriers around rich fishing grounds off the Northeast Asian coast and rigidly excluded the Japanese. Trade with Communist China has been curbed by the Japanese themselves in order to keep their policies in line with United Nations resolutions and American views. They have also resisted trade inducements from the Soviet Union which are tied up with political strings. Their trade relations with Southeast Asia and other areas of the world, including the United States, are being strengthened but they still fall far short of the need.

To a great extent, the margin between decent survival and starvation in Japan has been for years provided by aid-programs and special concessions from this country. These cannot go on indefinitely. Japan does not want them; neither does the United States.

We and others with deep interests in the Far East can close our eyes to the situation in Japan for the present. We can say "Japan's problems are Japan's business so let the Japanese solve them." The fact

is, however, that they cannot solve them alone. If we fail to recognize that fact, it will not be very long before economic pressures will act to wipe out the progress towards freedom which has been made in Japan and begin to affect her foreign policy. It will not be long before we and other countries will reap the adverse political harvest of our indifference.

A Far Eastern economic conference, I believe, can be helpful. It can define frankly and clearly the specific problems, not only of Japan but of other nations in the area. It can consider solutions to these problems on the basis of mutual benefit and mutual sacrifice. It can, in short, bring reason to bear before it is too late, before the seeds of future crises begin to sprout in the Western Pacific.

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