THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen
16th District.

LEGISLATIVE BATTLE FRONT.

In truth and fact, the House of Representatives has been a battle front. The forces of economy and efficiency moved in on every appropriation bill to wage sharp conflict on items that seem dispensable in wartime; an offensive was laid down on un-American activities among Federal employees; a pay-as-you-go task force finally conquered the Treasury bastions with a measure which forgives part of 1942 taxes and places the nation on a pay-as-you-earn basis; the entrenched Home Owners Loan Corporation would be more expeditiously liquidated if House action thereon is upheld; the citadel of petty racketeering was assailed by the Hobbs bill; the attempted invasion of the authority of Congress was thrust back by action on the salary ceiling bill; reconnaissance parties in the form of investigating committees are doing work on war contracts, Farm Security Administration abuses of power by administrative agencies and in other sectors. Congress, smarting from criticism levelled at it during the last two years because of inaction has become an alert, mobile, better-equipped, hard-hitting task force and from all appearances the battle on the legislative front will continue.

THE TRADE AGREEMENT SECTOR.

Next encounter begins this week in the Trade Agreement Sector. A bit of history will make the communiques from the legislative front a little more clear concerning objectives and positions. In 1932, when depression engulfed the nation, it struck not only us but all other nations as well. It was world wide. Business slackened, unemployment increased, relief increased, national income dropped sharply and the dollar value of our foreign trade likewise dropped to unusually low levels. New foreign trade practices appeared. Various exchange barriers were created. The value of foreign exchange such as francs, marks, pounds, pesos, pesetas, milreis, guilders when measured on the basis of our dollar, dropped in value making it necessary to use more money in foreign countries to get dollars with which to pay for imported goods. All this was to our disadvantage.

Finally, it was alleged that high tariffs on goods coming into the United States made it impossible to develop volume business with foreign countries and that some action must be taken.

TRADE AGREEMENT ACT.

Thus it was that in 1934, Congress passed the so-called Trade Agreement Act, giving the President power to negotiate trade agreements with other nations and to decrease any existing tariff duty by not more than 50%. In consequence, a large number of such agreements have been made with Canada, Britain, South and Central American republics and others. The original 1934 act was sharply opposed on the ground that it gave the Treaty making power to the President without the consent of the Senate as provided by the Constitution. Other arguments were advanced. But the Act was passed and later extended in 1937 and 1940 because it was originally drawn for three years. It expires in June of 1943 and Congress is again confronted with this controversy.

RE-ALIGNMENT.

The present situation however differs somewhat from that which obtained heretofore. There has been an opportunity to appraise the trade agreement program after 9 years of experience. The President and many manufacturers who were skeptical before have now endorsed the program. Perhaps some of the real objections to the program heretofore has been the secrecy of the negotiations, lack of adequate notice before hearings begin, lack of time for affected persons and groups to properly present their case, lack of adequate information to the country as a whole on the effect of the program, and lack of a committee made up of representatives from industry, agriculture, labor, and the public to examine each agreement and make a report thereon to the country. These items will doubtless be covered in the form of amendments which will be offered.

TRADE AND PEACE.

The matter of expanded trade between nations is all-important at this time. The world is engulfed in war and hopeful hearts envision a day when really lasting peace will come. Peace will last if it has a chance to last. It is therefore essential that every effort be made to give peace a chance to endure. Peace and trade are bound up together. Stated as a sort of an equation it would run like this: Lack of foreign trade generates unemployment, slackened business, economic pressure. Economic pressure usually calls for governmental action. Governmental action may take the form of new exchange rates, new barriers or exchange alliances with certain nations. When the pressure to ease the internal economic conditions becomes sufficiently heavy, it takes the form of aggression and aggression is war. Thus the action to be taken will be important and significant from the standpoint of future peace.