

ECONOMIC AGREEMENT WITH FREE FRENCHContinuance Confirmed

Economic Agreements between His Majesty's Government and the Free French National Committee were signed to-day. These Agreements relate to French Equatorial Africa and the French Cameroons, and cover the period from the 1st October, 1941, to the 30th September, 1942. Nearly half the period of the Agreements has elapsed, and the economic transactions to which reference is made are, of course, already in progress. The Agreements in fact do no more than confirm and promise the continuance of a state of affairs which already exists.

The Agreements are mainly concerned with the products of Free French African territories which His Majesty's Government undertakes to buy. Among these undertakings are included the purchase of the whole output of palm kernels, palm oil, groundnuts and benniseed from both territories, the purchase of the total output of cocoa from the French Cameroons and the purchase of the total output of cotton (up to a maximum of 20,000 tons) from French Equatorial Africa. Other products of which His Majesty's Government undertakes to buy specific quantities are rutile, coffee, bananas and timber from the French Cameroons and coffee and timber from French Equatorial Africa.

The terms of the Agreements are closely similar to those of the Agreements which were signed last year and which related to the previous twelve months; but with the development of hostilities in the Far East and the entry of America into the war, the whole West African area has become increasingly important as a source of Allied supplies, and the underlying purpose of the Agreements has, therefore, been largely transformed.

When French Equatorial Africa and the French Cameroons rallied to the Free French cause, it was considered that their principal value to the Allies was political and strategical. Even in those days there were many products from these territories which the Allies could usefully employ, but none the less, one of the principal aims of the 1940/41 Agreements was to give to Free French Africa the full measure of British economic support in gratitude for services in other fields.

This aim has of course not been entirely submerged. Indeed, it is hoped that the economic association of the Free French African territories with the Allies will bring to these territories an ever-increasing prosperity. But the key-note is now the economic help which the Free French Colonial movement is bringing to the Allies and not vice versa. Henceforward the contribution of Free France to the Allied victory will be as great in the economic field as elsewhere.

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