

*Speech for*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

OCTOBER 5, 1938  
No. 478

CONFIDENTIAL RELEASE FOR PUBLICATION IN THE MORNING NEWSPAPERS  
OF FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1938, WHICH DO NOT APPEAR  
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ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONORABLE GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH,  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, AT THE DINNER GIVEN ON BOARD  
THE S.S. BRAZIL IN NEW YORK ON THE EVENING OF THURSDAY,  
OCTOBER 6, 1938, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING, UNDER THE  
AUSPICES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES, OF THE NEW  
STEAMSHIP SERVICE TO THE EAST COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, gentlemen. I share with you this evening the great privilege of being present on an historic occasion. We celebrate and initiate the placing of a sea transport service of this country for passengers and goods to the east coast of South America on a basis meeting the requirements of modern travel and transport and at the same time commensurate with the importance of the countries it serves. We are translating lip service to the idea of close cooperation with our friends in the South into this very real performance of our Government -- the inauguration of a sea service of three modern passenger vessels and a fleet of fast freighters.

It is indeed fitting that the representatives of so many of the American States should join with us, the representatives of the American Government, and of every phase of our national life, political, cultural, financial, industrial, commercial and maritime, in meeting on this ship which is the largest to ever enter the regular trade between the United States and the Republics of the east coast of South America.

I am going to take very little of your time this evening and, therefore, what I shall say to you will necessarily be very incomplete. The event which we are celebrating speaks for itself in such a degree that words become unimportant. It is my conviction that what we may say here this evening sinks to insignificance before the fact that so many of us are here from so many American States and representing so many sections of our population. When this proud vessel sails from this port day after tomorrow, it will not be merely another ship heading South; it will be an eloquent expression of the good will and friendship of 130 million people in this country for our friends in South America and of our interest in knowing them better and in their knowing us better. Anything we say this evening then sinks into insignificance before the fact that this ship is sailing under the auspices of this Government.

When this event is viewed in perspective to its historical background we shall consider it properly as the most recent step in a traditional relationship between the Americas and any relation which we may feel at the accomplishment we are celebrating must be tinged with deference to those who have labored so long and so well before in this field and whose dreams and acts have made that relationship the tradition it now is. The inauguration of this service is an evidence of the spirit of continental solidarity which is deeply rooted in our national life and must be viewed as a concrete effort on our part to realize that closer and wider relationship among the American States which is the basis of our good neighbor policy -- a policy to which, I believe, the people throughout the Western Hemisphere are deeply attached and of the vital importance of which there can no longer be any doubt.

The golden age of our maritime greatness in this country may be said to have come to a close during the period of the Civil War and the first public act for the reconstruction of American shipping came towards the end of that critical period of our history. At that time we had triangular mail service with Brazil for, although we had a minister and consuls in Brazil and the beginnings of important mutual commercial intercourse, we could only send a letter there by the circuitous route of transmitting it in a British steamer to England and then by British steamer from England to Brazil and back again by the same route. There is a dramatic significance in the historic fact that the harassed Congress of a war-weary nation did not fail to take effective action to provide for the rehabilitation of American shipping. It is particularly significant that this Act was taken in conjunction with a South American State and that this measure led to the establishment of the United States and Brazil Mail Steamship Company. I have reference to the bill passed on May 24, 1864 by the Senate of the United States which authorized the Postmaster General to cooperate with the Post Office Department of Brazil in establishing direct mail communication between the two countries by means of a number of first-class American sea-going vessels, the maintenance of which was to be divided between the two Governments under separate ten-year contracts to become effective September 1, 1865.

A quarter of a century passed and seven American lines were in operation between this country and other American republics, only one of which went as far as Brazil. Then in 1889 there met in Washington the First International Conference of American States. It convened in response to an Act of the Congress of May 24, 1888 which authorized the President to invite the South American nations to join us in a conference and it is notable that in authorizing the invitations the law specified as the first matter for consideration, "measures that shall tend to preserve the peace and promote the prosperity of the several American States", and further, "the establishment of regular and frequent communications between ports of the several American States and the ports of each other". From the very outset, therefore, we have realized that direct and continuous communication fosters peaceful relations between States and that the mutual exchange of goods is a solid basis for friendly relationships.

This International American Conference was preceded by a study of the situation made by the South American Commission established by the Congress in 1884 which visited the Latin American States and reported its findings to the Congress. This Commission found several obstacles in the path of the development of the mutual interests of the American States, but it considered the chief and fundamental reason for the lack of trade in the American hemisphere the absence of facilities for rapid and regular communication and transportation. So long ago then did wise people realize the need for this adequate transportation service which we are now establishing.

This First International American Conference in 1889 labored seriously and produced three communications reports, one concerning the Mexican and Caribbean area recommending that existing services be speeded up, one concerning the Pacific area recommending the establishment of subsidized lines, and a third recommending the extension of such subsidized lines in the Atlantic area. These reports were transmitted by the then Secretary of State, Mr. Blaine, to President Harrison, who sent them to the Congress with his approval. One of the results was the Ocean Mail Act of 1891.

I think it is of interest to note that the report of the International American Conference on the Atlantic sea service contained the recommendation that shipping lines be encouraged to Brazil and to the River Plate under 10-year contracts and with 5,000-ton, 16-knot ships and that the contracting Governments should contribute to the service in the proportion of 60 percent by the United States; 17 1/2 percent by Argentina; 17 1/2 percent by Brazil, and 5 percent by Uruguay. The Conference further recommended that an auxiliary 12-knot freight service be established between the United States and Brazil to supplement the United States and Brazil Mail Steamship Line, the two Governments immediately concerned each to pay one-half of the cost.

By 1914, when another quarter of a century had elapsed, the World War had begun in Europe. Again we in the Americas became aware in no indefinite way of the inadequacy of the shipping facilities under the control of ourselves and the other American States. The direct result of that disturbance in shipping was the acquisition of foreign-going vessels by both the North and South American States. An indirect result, and some of us may think coming rather late, is the present undertaking.

Still another quarter of a century has passed and dislocation in world conditions and the new situations which we have to meet have brought us again to the beginnings of a new phase. May we hope that we are now finally on the threshold of the adequate inter-American transportation facilities by sea which all advocates of close inter-American friendship have urged since the days of Independence. Again events in Europe and elsewhere, and outside of these western continents, have brought sharply to the consciousness of the American States their interdependence upon an adequate American transportation system. It has taken a full half century of world-upsetting events to bring about that public sentiment which has made the sailing of this great ship possible in this trade on October 9 of this year.

I venture to state that the inauguration of this service is one of the most significant developments in inter-American relationships for it is a definite expression



of the will to put into effect all those acts on the part of all of us which are necessary to establish among the American States that relationship which world events are making ever more necessary and vital.

May I say that there is for me an intimate personal satisfaction in this event. During the years that I was privileged to spend in the Republics of the Southern Hemisphere, I became acutely aware of the need for proper and adequate ships to carry inter-American trade and travel. Travelers of today demand modern passenger ships providing adequate comfort. Travel between the American States, particularly on the east coast, has been impeded by the lack of such facilities. With the ships now being placed in this trade, and with those which I believe we may confidently predict will follow, there cannot but result increasing travel from north to south and from south to north which will result in our countries and our peoples coming to know each other in a degree hitherto unattainable. Through such development of commerce in persons and goods mutual understanding will unquestionably increase and I am one of those who believe that mutual knowledge of the Americas of each other and mutual knowledge of our peoples and cultures will result in good for us all. We have a great deal not only in goods but in ideas that we can exchange with mutual advantage and the greater contact between peoples and the better mutual knowledge of institutions and cultures can only result in widening and in strengthening those ties so happily already firmly established.

After a period of trial and error, it seems that we are on the right path in the establishment of adequate sea transport services to the east coast. Much remains to be accomplished, but I think we may be assured that the Maritime Commission will spare no effort to maintain and improve this vital link between the Americas now being established. Just as our peoples can only deepen their respect for each other through greater contact and knowledge of each other, so in the field of our trade the interchange of commodities can only fortify these friendly ties. Our trade with the Argentine, with Brazil and with Uruguay is very largely on a complementary instead of a competitive basis. The artificial barriers are one by one being removed and simplified and the system of reciprocal trade agreements, which has already shown in practice its mutually helpful results, is bound to continue in its further development.

One of the cornerstones of the policy of the Maritime Commission has been to revitalize and modernize the service to the east coast of South America as an indispensable element in the growing friendship among the American Republics. We in the Department of State are very much interested in the development of this line. We realize that ships and goods are vital factors in the relationships between States. The advantages accruing to each of the four countries served by this line are reciprocal and are so readily apparent that we of the Department of State join with the Maritime Commission and the other agencies of our Government in celebrating this as a significant event in inter-American friendship.

May I say again how much we appreciate the presence here this evening of the representatives of the Governments of Brazil, of the Argentine and of Uruguay and of the other American States who have honored this gathering. We appreciate the presence here this evening of so many distinguished leaders of all aspects of our life in this country. We are rededicating ourselves to the service of a great idea - the deepening and the strengthening of the ties which bind the Americas and of the expression of this idea this good ship is, I believe, a fine symbol. That it is a subsidized ship is, I believe, encouraging for it means that our people, after years of hesitation and years of careful consideration, are realistically facing a problem which required solution. This is a world in which we have today grim facts to face and common ideals to uphold. We in the Americas will not falter. One of the most encouraging things in inter-American relationships, and a circumstance which showed how deeply rooted among us all is that common ideal of the maintenance of law and order in international relationships, is the common and spontaneous action of these States in the recent crisis. As we know each other better, and these ships will help us to do so, this communion of interest and of action will be more firmly established.

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