

Dirksen's Oil Begins to Boil Over Trade

By Jack Anderson

Senate GOP Leader Everett Dirksen, that delightful old political snake charmer, is losing his spell over his Republican charges. Of late, there has been a trace of gall in the famous ooze he spreads around the Senate.

He has shown an uncharacteristic petulance toward Republican freshmen who question his leadership and a sharpness toward reporters who criticize his actions. He has also lost the sublime subtlety with which he used to pull strings for his law clients in the Senate.

He has been rather obvious, for example, about seeking protection for the steel industry from foreign competition. His Peoria, Ill., law firm has represented such steel clients as U.S. Steel, Mid-States Steel & Wire, and Keystone Steel & Wire.

The truth is that our steel industry is in no great danger from foreign competition. The Japanese, whose mills are the biggest threat, have even agreed to a voluntary quota on steel shipments to the United States.

Nevertheless, Dirksen continues to pressure the White House not only for tighter import controls but for approval to set up U.S. steel mills overseas. This would permit the big steel companies to hire cheap foreign labor, thus slashing their labor costs.

In all his backroom activity for the steel interests, old Ev has also become uncommonly abusive toward the Japanese. He presses the cause of steel and his campaign against the Japanese at every opportunity he gets to slip in an oiled word.

During President Nixon's private report to congressional leaders on his overseas trip, for example, Dirksen found a chance to bring up his favorite subject. The President suggested that the time had come cautiously to lower East-West trade barriers.

"I want to interpose a difference," objected Dirksen in his best basso profundo. "Some countries think they have a vested interest in U.S. trade."

Other congressional leaders

easily recognized that he was referring to Japan. Then he launched into a melodious tirade on the detrimental effect any trade liberalization would have on "shoes" and "steel." He wound up with the argument that steel companies, in order to compete, must be permitted to move their plants overseas.

The President replied that an easing of trade restrictions would raise the per capita income in communist countries and permit them to buy more U.S. goods. Then he moved on to another phase of his trip. He didn't mention Japan, except to say briefly that she should play a bigger role in the Asian economy. The subject of Okinawa didn't even come up.

Yet Dirksen, when he later summarized the presidential briefing for Republican Senators at a closed-door policy luncheon, devoted his entire report to Japan, Okinawa and East-West trade. He got so steamed up over Okinawa—"We took it by the blood of our men and, by God, we should never give it back to Japan"—that his son-in-law, Tennessee Sen. Howard Baker, tried to quiet him.

"I think the Senator ought to know," interrupted Baker soothingly, "that the decision on Okinawa has already been made by the State Department."

Dirksen snorted, and changed the subject. Trade barriers should never be lowered, he growled, until measures have been taken "to protect menaced American industries." Once again, he mentioned "shoes" and "steel."

He never got around to reporting on the President's trip, the subject that had brought the GOP Senators to the luncheon.

But if his Republican colleagues are growing disenchanted with Dirksen, at least his steel clients should be pleased.

Pentagon strategists are still puzzling over the eight-week lull in enemy activity in Vietnam. The communists are poised in striking positions in a number of places, and captured documents show preparations for an offensive. Yet the mid-summer lull continues.

Most military experts believe that Hanoi is merely

waiting for the best time to strike another blow. Some think the communists will lay low for a few months because they don't want to discourage American withdrawals. Others contend that the communists would like to disrupt an orderly American phaseout and, therefore, that they can be expected to attack at any time.

President Nixon during his recent Vietnam visit studied the battlefield situation intently. Afterward, he remarked privately that he was impressed with the possibility that the enemy lull may be a measure of our own military effectiveness. U.S. forces have inflicted heavy losses upon the enemy.

However, the President also raised another possibility. He suggested that the communists may simply be trying to keep our casualty rate high enough to be unacceptable to us yet low enough not to provoke U.S. military retaliation.

Meanwhile, the Hanoi government has given no hint in Paris that the military inaction means they are ready to negotiate a Vietnam truce.

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