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Chance of Trade Accord Still Dim, U.S. Aides Say

Rogers and Kosygin Confer for an Hour to Summarize Differences and Devise an Agenda for Additional Talks

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MOSCOW, May 28—United States officials said today that the chances for specific agreements on new trading arrangements between the Soviet Union and the United States remained dim.

The two highest ranking officials in the trade talks here, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, met for an hour today to summarize their outstanding differences and devise an agenda for the extended talks, which will clearly be necessary in view of the failure to reach agreement here.

There was no official briefing or statement on the talks, but informed officials said that one major snag was the difference between the customary rates for freight sent in American ships and the prevailing world rate, which is considerably lower and which the Russians would like to pay.

The officials said privately that both sides had agreed in principle to a 50-50 split on ships. This means that half of all new trade would be carried in American bottoms and half would be carried on Soviet ships charging the prevailing world rate.

Too Costly, Russians Say

But, the officials added, the Russians have argued strongly that the cost of shipping in American bottoms will be prohibitively expensive and the Russians say they do not wish to subsidize the high wages paid to American longshoremen and other maritime workers with their own hard currency.

At the same time, however, the American negotiators including Andrew E. Gibson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Maritime Affairs, are under heavy pressure from the longshoremen and other maritime unions at home not to reach a bargain that may be economically unfair even though it may be diplomatically useful to President Nixon's efforts to build better relations with the Soviet Union.

Given these and other problems, officials say, the likelihood of agreement not only on broader aspects of trade but also on shipments of grain to the Soviet Union is small.

There have been reports that tomorrow's final communiqué would include an announcement of a short-term $130-million sale of American grain to Russia for which the Russians would pay hard currency. But United States officials now say that this will not happen unless there is a last-minute breakthrough.

American officials also said that the two sides had yet to agree, and probably would not agree here, to a settlement of the Soviet Union's World War II lend-lease debt.

Before the talks began, the United States had been asking for $800-million and the Russians had been offering $300-million. Sources now say that both sides are closer on the dollar figure but that there is disagreement on the number of years the Soviet Union should be given to satisfy the debt.

The officials said that a resolution of the lend-lease question was not a prerequisite to arranging a broad new trade agreement. But earlier this year Moscow made clear its hope that a lend-lease deal would be part of a broader agreement, and the Administration has said that it would be reluctant to ask Congress to approve some of the Soviet requests—such as "most-favored-nation" treatment on tariffs, which requires Congressional approval, until the lend-lease problem is settled.

Under "most-favored-nation" treatment, imports from the Soviet Union would receive whatever tariff advantages were given to other United States trading partners.

Despite the problems, however, both sides remain hopeful. When the talks began, the outlines of a bargain had begun to emerge. For its part, the Soviet Government would buy a certain amount of American goods primarily such complex equipment as computers, as well as agricultural products over a long period.

U.S. Favors Credits

The Americans meanwhile had indicated a willingness to give the Russians "most-favored-nation" treatment as well as credits to enable Moscow to purchase American goods.

Now that the talks are all but over, it is clear that in principle anyway this is the kind of bargain that both sides would still like to strike. Such a bargain would result in at least a tenfold increase of Soviet-American trade from the present $200-million annual level.

But the problems remain—primarily lend-lease and the cost per ton of goods shipped in American bottoms—and American officials are saying that much hard negotiating remains ahead.

The remaining difficulties, they said, will be discussed in two settings. State Department officials will continue to talk to their Soviet counterparts about lend-lease, and the Commerce and Agricultural Departments and the Maritime Administration will bargain on grains and other items the Soviet Union wants.