The bond of sympathy and friendship, the 'blood brotherhood', which the American people have already felt for the British is strong as ever today. When our interviewers have asked voters to name their favourite foreign country, Britain has always led the voting by a wide margin. It is not surprising therefore to find American thinking today based on the concept that it is essential for American security to keep Britain strong. In fact America’s foreign policy has been predicated for many generations on the concept of a powerful Britain to protect our Atlantic flank. In September, 1949, when a cross-section of the American voting public was asked to express its views on the question, ‘Do you think it makes much difference or only a little difference to the United States whether England continues to be a strong world power?’ the people voted, by a ratio of 2 to 1, that it is of vital importance to have a strong Britain.

But while the feeling of kinship is strong, and while the American people want Britain to continue in her place as a world power, nevertheless it is extremely important for British leaders and public to understand the American attitude toward economic and financial help.

One of the most difficult things for a European to realise is the utter indifference of the average American toward the whole subject of foreign trade. Englishmen and Europeans to whom the export-import business is a subject of almost daily conversation can hardly conceive of the naïveté and ignorance of Americans on that subject. When the average American thinks about the matter at all (which is not often), he tends to think only in terms of exports. To him the words ‘foreign trade’ mean selling goods to other countries. He has no comprehension of the reciprocal nature of foreign trade, of the need for buying as well as selling, importing as well as exporting. Such terms as ‘unfavourable balance of trade’ or ‘export-import ratio’ would be as meaningless to him as something written in Greek. And he is unfamiliar not merely with the terms and phrases as such, but with the principles involved. It may come as a shock to the trade-minded Britisher to learn that, after Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s reciprocal trade agreement programme had been in effect for more than ten years, only one American voter in every ten had any idea what the reciprocal trade programme was. This is symptomatic of the general lack of comprehension and lack of interest in the whole field of foreign trade.

In seeking American aid, the British may find this ignorance of the a, b, c’s of foreign trade a major obstacle. To put forward the British case for American help on the basis of the necessities of trade, or economic need generally, is to put forward the case least likely to be effective and least likely to arouse the interest of American people. The average American simply does not understand enough about trade in general or about British economics in particular. When Englishmen plead a shortage of dollars, the picture evoked in the minds of Americans is one of loading the S.S. Queen Mary with American dollars and sending her off to Southampton.

Of course the economic aspects of Britain’s present difficulties are well-known to a small but important segment of well-informed Americans. But if the British appeal to the American public as a whole is pitched mainly on economics it will almost certainly fail to arouse or convince. The fact that President Truman has taken so forthright a position in favour of aid to Britain does not carry quite the same weight with American voters that a similar statement might carry in Britain if uttered by the head of the ruling party. Party discipline is far less efficient than in England. Winning over certain key men in the government is of course immensely helpful, but ultimately the British case will succeed or fail to the extent that it wins favour at the bar of American public opinion, before which all members of Congress must stand.