

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Ambassador Laurence A. Steinhardt reported to the Department tonight from Moscow as follows:

"I have just seen Assistant Commissar of Foreign Affairs Potemkin and have vigorously reiterated my indignation at the lack of cooperation by the Soviet Government in withholding information from me while issuing communiques with respect to the City of Flint through the medium of the Tass Agency. He replied that Tass was an official agency of the Soviet Government and that it was the custom of his Government to make announcements through it. I told him that this was no excuse for his failure to keep me informed particularly in view of my repeated requests for information on behalf of my Government which had been the purpose of my daily visits to him. After a lengthy discussion I formally demanded that the vessel and cargo be turned over to the American crew and be authorized to depart. He thereupon made the following statement:

"The City of Flint had come into the port of Murmansk in charge of a German prize crew without any previous knowledge on the part of the Soviet Government and through no act on its part. The reason ascribed by the prize crew for the entry was damaged machinery making the ship unseaworthy. When the Soviet authorities at Murmansk judged that the vessel was again fit to put to sea, and being desirous of preserving its neutrality, the Soviet Government had ordered the vessel to leave the port of Murmansk immediately under the same conditions as those of her entry, namely, with both the German and American crews on board and her cargo intact. He added that the order would be enforced immediately and that the Soviet Government felt that its decision was not only in accordance with the well-recognized principles of international law and consonant with the obligations of a neutral but it was also the correct position to take as between the conflicting claims of the United States and Germany to possession of the vessel and her cargo and that by this he meant 'to send her out in the same status as she had entered one of the ports.'

"He said that his government did not consider that it had the right to turn the vessel and her cargo over to the American crew unless the German prize crew refused to take her out, as in the opinion of his government to do so would be an unneutral act. In reply to a question he stated that the decision of the Soviet Government to permit the German prize crew to take the vessel to sea was final.

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"I then asked him who had verified the alleged damage to the machinery, to which he replied that he had no information on this subject, but assumed this had been done by the authorities at Murmansk.

"I again inquired concerning the welfare of the American crew and he said that it was his understanding that they had been on board the ship all of the time and were well.

"I then referred to my difficulties in making contact with the Captain or members of the crew reciting my repeated attempts to get into communication with them by telegram and telephone, as well as my inability to obtain a plane today. He disclaimed any responsibility for these difficulties, passing over the subject lightly by pointing out that the crew being on board the ship in the roadstead, in conjunction with the average delays in long distance telephone communication had probably brought about this "unfortunate result".

"I am again endeavoring to complete a telephone connection with the Captain of the CITY OF FLINT at midnight."