

BRITISH EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

December 20th, 1939

No. 1433

My Lord,

In my despatch No. 1412 I had the honour to advise that in a despatch by the next day I intended to deal with the position of the British Library of Information generally and particularly with the situation created by your telegram No. 894 to which I have now replied in my telegram No. 927.

2. Since the early days of the war the Library has been performing two functions. In the first place it has been watching and reporting on opinion regarding the war in this country. The material on which the reports are based consists firstly of a series of ^{US} newspapers covering the country from West to East and North to South, secondly clippings from other newspapers containing comment of special interest forwarded by Consulates, and thirdly regular reports from Consuls on opinion in their districts. From this material the Library staff has been preparing day by day firstly by cable short reports on favourable opinion in the United States press and secondly by air mail more lengthy reports on the contents of the New York press, on the substance of broadcasts (valuable because the American broadcaster tends very much to say what he thinks his public likes to hear), memoranda prepared at short intervals on such matters as religious opinion in this country, and special reports on e.g. United States opinion with regard to

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The Right Honourable

The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,

etc., etc., etc.

INDEX

10.17 to B.L.I.

585/160

- /69
- /75

war aims, on opinion on the situation in the Far East, etc. I consider that these reports are especially valuable, particularly because they are written in this country and so against an American background. I was therefore somewhat disturbed to find in your telegram the suggestion that the Library should discontinue them, to save a very small additional expenditure on staff, and that they should be prepared in England where it will be almost impossible for any one no matter how conversant with this country to sense the local atmosphere which is so important to the accuracy and value of such reports. Reports prepared in England on the basis of previous knowledge, letters, newspapers and telegrams never will be as reliable as reports prepared by men in this country and in daily contact with the local personalities and atmosphere. Of course I have no objection to Chatham House making its own independent survey in its general appreciation of world opinion. But I am sure that both from their point of view and yours the first necessity is that a full survey and appreciation of American opinion should be prepared by the British Library of Information in this country for transmission home. I enclose a copy of a very complete memorandum by Mr. Fletcher on this side of the Library's work.

1/19

3. The second and I consider not less important task of the Library is to supply information to enquirers in this country. It has to be in a position to answer the large number of intelligent enquiries which come from friendly circles, and to provide enquirers with adequate information, the diffusion of which in this way is one method of meeting the flood

of German propaganda, which I referred to in my despatch No. 1412 and which is often good and subtle, playing on various anti-British prejudices and elements in American opinion, raising doubts as to the sincerity of our war aims, whether we ought ever to have gone to war, and why we should continue it. The answering of such queries takes up a great deal of time and is a heavy strain on a small staff but unless they are answered intelligently we may lose good and in some cases old friends, and miss the opportunity of "killing" promptly enemy lies and innuendoes. Equally important is the provision to enquirers in an accessible and in distributable form of information regarding our efforts and intentions. The Blue Book was most valuable for this reason, and so have been the reprints of the Prime Minister's broadcast on 25th November. Your Lordship's broadcast of November 7th and the speeches of Mr. Atlee on October 10th and the Archbishop of York on October 2nd, all of which the Library has had printed in New York and distributed not only to enquirers at the Library itself, but through the agency of the various Consulates to enquirers all over the country. The Library must have a supply of good up to date topical material in a form suitable for handing out to the public and I trust that there will be no question regarding the small expense involved in having it printed locally. As the character of the war develops and particularly in consequence of the new angle created by the Russian attack on Finland the simplicity of the issue as it has existed hitherto is likely to disappear, and it will almost certainly be necessary

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to have more and more information and interpretation available, often in the shape of ad hoc pamphlets. Some can be prepared here, most of them will have to come from the Ministry of Information. But in the case of pamphlets and of speeches such as those mentioned above it is most satisfactory to forward the material to the British Library of Information as fast as possible and then to have it printed in New York.

It may be a little cheaper to have it printed in London but it takes too long for the supplies to cross the Atlantic and to be of use the information must be available quickly.

4. To perform these two functions has proved a heavy strain on an insufficient staff working until quite recently in inadequate quarters. The problem of accommodation has been satisfactorily solved by the recent authority to rent additional space and the Library is now adequately but no more than adequately accommodated. If the staff asked for in my telegram No. 736 is approved the Library will, in my opinion, be sufficiently, but no more than sufficiently staffed. It will still be working under great pressure and be hard put to it to deal adequately with its other main function, the provision of information.

-/56

5. With sufficient staff I believe that the Library can do all that it is required at present. British lecturers, except for a very few exceptions who do not talk about politics at all, are not called for. They are almost invariably a definite liability - not so much because of what they say but because any British lecturer is regarded from one end of the

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-5-

United States to another, as coming over here for one purpose and one purpose only, to "propaganda" America into something it does not want to do - usually to get into the war.

6. Finally, I would urge again that the best answer to German propaganda is publicity from London of what Britain is thinking and doing presented by first class American press, radio and film experts, who should be allowed the freest access, both at the front and at home, to information and eminent personages so as to be able to present as full, vivid and accurate a story as possible. Probably nothing impresses this country so much as "hot" news and pictures from their own correspondents, which seems, from its frankness, to have "beaten the censor".

I have the honour to be,

with the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,
humble servant,

(SGD) LOTHIAN