

Seen by H.E.

7

Abaw
FR

M3
29/3.

Mr

[C 3814/G]

(No. 253.)

Foreign Office,

My Lord Marquess,

March 11, 1940.

I HAD a talk to Mr. Sumner Welles this afternoon. He began by saying that he wished to make it plain that his visit was, of course, exploratory, and that the President was not at all interested in helping anything of the nature of a patched-up peace. The only thing that mattered was the establishment of security.

2. He thought that Signor Mussolini wished to keep out of the war, felt that, if the war was intensified, this would be likely to become progressively more difficult, and that, accordingly, Signor Mussolini was anxious to lend his assistance in finding the way by which the war might be brought to an end. The Duce has asked Mr. Welles to see him again on his way back, which Mr. Welles had not originally meant to do, and had said that he thought by then he might have information that would be useful to the President. While speaking of Italy Mr. Welles asked my view about what might be expected to be the Italian demands in any peace conference. I said that, of course, Tunis and Djibuti principally concerned the French, that the Suez Canal perhaps principally concerned us, and that, like a great many other things, the request for an Italian directorship would present very much less difficulty if we were living in a secure world where people trusted one another than in a world where everybody was looking over their shoulder at somebody else. Mr. Welles then said something about Gibraltar, to which I replied that, if the suggestion was that we should hand back Gibraltar to Spain or agree to some international arrangement for it, I could give him very little encouragement. I found it difficult to think that the British people would be prepared to let go of something that might be an element of considerable strength in war, unless they could really feel that the age of possible war had passed away. That time was not yet.

3. With regard to Germany, Mr. Welles said we should be surprised to know how frequently the word "security" had occurred in what had been said to him by leaders of the German Government, and that there was no doubt the German people were entirely convinced of the Allied intention to destroy and disrupt Germany if they secured the victory.

4. In the conversation that ensued I did my best to make the British point of view plain, emphasising our complete solidarity with the French, our complete loss of confidence in anything that Herr Hitler or the present German Government might say, and our determination, so far as it was humanly possible, to prevent this war finishing on terms that left Germany free to continue the policy that had induced it. At some point in the conversation Mr. Welles interjected to say that his judgment as to the unreliability of the present German Government did not differ from our own: "Any signature of Herr Hitler upon any paper that you might get obviously is not worth the paper it is written on." I told Mr. Welles that, while it might be possible to put down on paper, as we had in general terms, indeed, often sought to do, the political issues to be secured, *i.e.*, restoration of liberty to Poles and Czechs, possible plebiscite for

His Excellency, The Most Honourable
The Marquess of Lothian, C.H.

8
END.

Austria, disarmament, &c., the fundamental question was how were any of these settlements to be judged reliable so long as we were dealing with the present régime in Germany. Many, indeed, felt that it was not only a question of the present régime but of something much more fundamental. Thus it was that both the French and ourselves were constantly seeking to find effective guarantees for the future that we did not feel to be forthcoming from any promises and undertakings.

5. This led Mr. Welles to ask, on the assumption that the political issues could be settled, was it impossible to find such material guarantees as would give general confidence. He developed this to mean disarmament by the gradual destruction of offensive weapons on some qualitative basis, the restriction of national air forces and the creation of an international air police force. On this I made two comments, the first that I found it impossible to reconcile Hitler's present behaviour in Poland with the suggestion that he might be all the time willing genuinely to reconstitute and repair Poland in any fashion that would seem to us approaching to just, and, secondly, that, although I had grave doubts about the practicability of an international air force, all of us here would wish to see developed any effective measures of disarmament. These must, however, take time, and the degree to which they could be put into operation would also depend upon the degree of real confidence that could attach to the whole proceeding. Whether and how far this could be achieved by any system of international inspection or any other machinery that could be devised was a matter that would require much consideration. He expressed the view that the United States Government would be prepared to take its due part in the work of international inspection of the process of disarmament, as they would also in the task of economic effort and reconstruction.

6. On the first of my observations, Mr. Welles made the not uninteresting comment that he would not have assumed a possible settlement of the political issues if he had not felt this to be possible. Did we not, on our side, think it might be possible that Herr Hitler, feeling that general war was imminent and unavoidable, was anxious to strengthen himself on the East by making it impossible for elements to remain there to cause him trouble when the time came? He would himself have thought that Bohemia was more difficult of settlement than Poland. In his view it all turned upon whether or not such measures could be felt to give real security, still on the assumption that the political issues had not been found impossible of settlement.

7. Mr. Welles thought anything in the nature of armistice was impossible, and demobilisation could only be expected after the political issues had been settled and as progress was made in the destruction of the main offensive weapons. He quoted one of those high in the German Government as having said to him: "The Allies want to make us return to the early 19th century, when we were separate and small units, and say that in those days we produced musicians and writers. If we were to return to that state to-day, it is not writers and artists that we should produce, but Bolsheviks and Communists." The conclusion, as he thought, generally throughout Germany was that it was felt that the unity of Germany was essential to avoid worse disasters, and that the object of the Allies in the destruction of the present régime was to destroy the unity of Germany. I took the opportunity of telling Mr. Welles that there was no British opinion in favour of the disruption, dismemberment and destruction of Germany, and that, apart from the settlement of precise political issues to which we were pledged, the whole problem was one of continuing security. All this, however, was without reference to the other great elements that were now involved in the problem, namely, Russia and Finland, which we did not have time to discuss.

I am, with great truth and respect,

My Lord Marquess,

Your Excellency's obedient Servant,

(For the Secretary of State)

J. Kirkpatrick