

BRITISH EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON, D.C.,

February 7th 1939.

No. 151.

My Lord,

43/15.  
As I had the honour to inform Your Lordship in my telegram No. 62 of February 3rd, the President at his press conference on that day emphatically denied that at his secret meeting with the members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee he had declared that the "American frontier was in France". He went on to accuse his opponents in Congress and certain elements in the press of having deliberately and mischievously misrepresented him to serve their own political ends. Finally as reported in my telegram under reference he declared that there had been no change in the foreign policy of the United States Government and enunciated in a set statement the four cardinal points on which he claimed this policy was based. The text of this statement is enclosed herein.

2. If the President hoped that his remarks would damp down the storm which has been raging in Congress and in the press ever since the news about the supply of aircraft to France leaked out, he was grievously mistaken. The only result of his action has been to add fuel to the flames, to encourage the opposition, and to make it almost inevitable/

The Right Honourable

The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,

etc., etc., etc.

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-2-

inevitable that Congress will insist on a full dress debate on the Government's foreign policy at an early date. It is generally believed that what the President really said to the Senators was that France represented the first line of defence of the United States, a statement which is self-evident to most sensible people and does not imply any commitment by the United States to come to France's assistance. Mr. Mark Sullivan, a veteran Republican columnist, has written much the same thing in an article entitled "England America's shield", in which he strongly advocates the sale of aircraft to the United Kingdom and France.

3. It is more the President's methods and the secrecy with which he is accused of trying to surround the Administration's actions than his actual policy that are being attacked at the present moment. The out-and-out isolationists are naturally in full cry against the President, though even they have not gone so far as to suggest that the supply of aircraft to France or the United Kingdom should be stopped. They are, however, complaining that the President by his actions is creating the impression, both at home and abroad, that the United States is definitely committed to support the United Kingdom and France in the event of a European crisis./



-3-

crisis. Senator Hamilton Lewis, for example, speaking in the Senate on January 31st, called attention to the remarks about the United States made by the Prime Minister in his recent speeches and insinuated that Mr. Chamberlain was endeavouring to suggest to the British people that "they had the great power of the United States in support of their measures and their undertakings". Mr. Lewis declared that there had never been an expression from those in authority in the United States to justify any foreign premier to say what the position of the United States would be in a matter in which the foreign government is involved, particularly where it is a military contention and a military conflict".

4. Many newspapers have, however, pointed out that the known sympathies of the President with the democratic powers are shared by the majority of people in this country, and that the last thing that American public opinion wishes to see is the triumph of the totalitarian states. It has indeed been pointed out that even President Hoover, in his speech mentioned in my despatch No. 138 of February 3rd, while attacking the President's policy, went out of his way to give a warning that in certain eventualities the United States could not remain indifferent to what might happen in Europe. The ex-President said: "We must not close our eyes to the conditions under which the American people,

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43/14

-4-

disregarding all other questions, might join in a European war. We are a humane people and our humanity can be overstrained by brutality. That was one of the causes of our entry into the last war. For instance, if wholesale attack were made on women and children by the deliberate destruction of cities from the air, then the indignation of the American people could not be restrained from action .....

I do not believe officials of any nation have become so foolish or dare the depth of barbarism of such an undertaking. The indignation in the United States to-day at such killings in Spain and China, where it is excused as the accident of attempts to demoralize munitions supply should be warning of the temper which would be raised". Walter Lippmann in an article in the paper of February 4th describes these words of Mr. Hoover as "very plain speaking indeed".

5. But even though a great many people in this country - and not only the members of his own party - may share the President's sympathies with the democracies, there can be little doubt that a very large body of opinion - Democrat as well as Republican - is profoundly distrustful of the President's methods, and nervous lest as a result of the secrecy and apparent haste with which he is alleged to be acting the people of the United States should suddenly find themselves definitely committed to a certain line of action in Europe without having had any opportunity of expressing an opinion in the matter. This feeling and also the complaint that,

instead/



-5-

instead of trying at this critical juncture as far as possible to establish the highest possible measure of agreement in the country on foreign policy, the President by his actions during the last ten days has only increased the differences of opinion on the subject, are widely voiced in the newspapers. In consequence there is a very general demand that the President should take an early opportunity of clarifying the situation, and of stating exactly what his policy is, and what steps he proposes to take to put this policy into effect. This feeling is well expressed by Mr. Arthur Krock in the "New York Times" of February 7th, where he writes:- "If the President believes, as he is credited with believing, that arms reduction will only come when the dictators are matched by the democracies to a point where war will be demonstrably a disastrous defeat, that the independence of nations will only be assured when that psychology is established; and that - short of war - the United States should pursue its policy to that end, why not openly say so to the American people?"

6. It is unfortunate that at a time when Mr. Roosevelt wishes to create abroad an impression of determination and unanimity he should still continue to alienate his moderate Democrats in Congress by injudicious and provocative appointments which indicate that his radicalism is by no means abated. There is a good deal of bad feeling between Congress and the President, and he is accused of not listening to the words of wisdom of Mr.

Garner/

-6-

Garner, who is an acknowledged expert in feeling the pulse of Congress. The President's critics within his own party are growing both in numbers and in outspokenness; they complain that he appears to remain blind to the lesson of last autumn's elections that the country wants no more experimental legislation and radical appointments, but wishes to return to the middle of the road. The danger of all this is that if the quarrel with Congress develops much further the President will be unable to carry his plans for the revision of the Neutrality Act.

*Let in P.L.  
No. 3 - Feb 7.*

7. I am sending a copy of this despatch to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Canada.

I have the honour to be,

with the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,

humble servant,

(SGD) V. A. L. WALKER,

H. M. Chargé d'Affaires.