

SUMNER WELLS PAPERS
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Moffat Diary 1933

April 3, 1933

Dined at Constantine Brown's to meet Roland (sp?), the Director of the Havas Agency, and Camille LeMercier, the new American representative who has just been two years in Germany. He says that the situation has developed there to a point where we cannot expect rational action. For years now, the country has been taught that it has suffered more in the last twelve years of peace than it did during the war; that Germany did not lose the war in a military way, but was stabbed in the back of its Socialists and Jews; that with six and one-half million officially unemployed and actually eight million out of work, there is a vast proportion of the population which has nothing to lose and would go gladly into any adventure; that in addition to these eight million, there are millions more of the small shopkeeper class, which, while retaining their shops, are not earning enough to keep body and soul together; that the inflation ruined the middle class and destroyed so many homes that the great conservative force of the family tie has now been weakened to the snapping point; that rearmament in Germany has actually begun and that one of the surest symptoms is the rise in the value of munitions stocks or allied industrial stocks on the German exchange since last February; that airplane factories are working on three shifts a day, etc., etc. He says that Germany is convinced that in case of trouble, England would, at every cost, remain neutral and that France would not march to the assistance of Poland. In case of war, the Germans would march as one man, but if things should go wrong and revolution should break out in Germany, it would be of a brutality the like of which the world has never seen. If the Communists should get the upper hand over the Nazis, they would shoot them down on the street corners like dogs. The picture was scarcely reassuring.

April 4, 1933

A telegram in from Norman Davis saying that he was anxious to go to Berlin at the end of the week, but could still put it off if we had any objections. My feeling was that with Germany holding the key to the disarmament situation, Norman Davis's visit there was essential. On the other hand, I recognized the embarrassment that might be caused owing to the Jewish situation. I therefore prepared a memorandum listing the pros and the cons as follows:

Reasons in favor of
Mr. Davis' trip
to Berlin

1. Germany holds the key to disarmament, and to the political problems involved in treaty revision.
2. Her position has been one of aggravation and threat.
3. Mr. Davis, as a disinterested outsider, might well be able to exert a quieting influence, and discourage any action which might precipitate a crisis.
4. As Mr. Davis has never yet visit Berlin, there have been signs of resentment, which may be accentuated if he now declines von Neurath's invitation, and thus diminish his eventual influence.

Reasons against

1. His visit would be generally construed as bearing upon the Jewish situation.
2. It would be difficult for him to avoid discussing the problem, with possible embarrassment either in this country, in Germany, or both.
3. It might not be advisable for a special representative of President Roosevelt to be entertained by the present German Government.
4. It seems doubtful whether von Neurath will remain long as Foreign Minister.

Bill Phillips sent this over to the White House with his personal recommendation that Davis give up the trip. Late in the afternoon, however, a memorandum came back in the President's own handwriting to the effect that the importance of a visit to Berlin outweighed the Jewish problem, but that Davis and the Department must both make it clear that during his visit he would discuss nothing but Disarmament and the Economic Conference dates.

Mr. Hyman, the Director of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, came down to see Bill Phillips, to show him the telegrams they had received from their organization abroad, which ^{not} gave/only a picture of the situation in Germany, but outlined prospects for relief. His information coincides with ours to the effect that while the brutal, violent stage must have passed, we were at the beginning of a long term campaign of persecution, particularly affecting the professional classes. Mr. Phillips agreed that the outlook was indeed ominous. Later on, Mr. Hyman came upstairs and spent a half hour or so with me, giving me more details. He told me that their Director had had to leave Berlin and was now in Paris, and that it would be necessary to transfer their headquarters. He hinted, without actually asking, that special facilities be given them in the way of the use of the pouch, the Government cipher for their communications, etc. I told him that this would obviously cause great embarrassment and might subject our Embassy to suspicion from the German authorities. He said he understood and would not press unless things grew worse. He then went on to explain that there were two groups of Jews, one advocating protest, mass meetings, retaliation, etc., the other (to which he belonged) desiring to soft-pedal foreign resentment unless organized by Gentiles as a purely humanitarian

measure. Just before leaving, he asked if I could tell him of the nature of the reports from our Embassy in Berlin. I told him that I could not do that, but that he could be assured that the Department was watching the situation both in its immediate phases and in its long term potentialities closely and sympathetically.

At half past five I went over to the Bacons' for a goodbye tea for the Claudels, at which they were given a silver urn from fifty Washington friends with all our signatures engraved. Returned to the Department, as the President's message about Davis' trip was not forthcoming until nearly seven o'clock. Found a telegram from George Gordon saying that the boycott was called off, but that Neurath was still anxious for us to issue some sort of a statement. Gordon went on to the effect that this would improve his position and thus strengthen the forces of moderation. I was very much against this on two grounds. In the first place, there was no longer any exaggerated agitation on which to hitch it, and the attitude of the German Government toward the Jews does not yet seem to have relented enough to warrant boosting them in a public statement. In the second place, I query the advisability of taking action to maintain a moderate Minister when the tide is running against him. At best it delays matters a few weeks, and the sum total is resentment on the part of the Ministers who eventually come in. I have seen this many times in the last year or two when we have tried to uphold the hands of Bruening, Herriot, etc., and it has never worked. Mr. Hull, whom I saw for a few minutes at 7:15, agreed with this point of view. I am told that the President is feeling so stirred up about the way things

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are developing in Germany that he is in no hurry to appoint an Ambassador there at the present time. I was also told that they had sent Prittwitz a very brutal telegram a day or two ago, telling him to hurry his departure and not wait on the manner of his going. He has accordingly changed all his plans and will be off in a week.

May 11, 1933

The German situation is rapidly going from bad to worse. In the Disarmament Conference there is a complete deadlock with Germany unwilling to recede from her position. Von Neurath, heretofore among the more moderates, has written an article categorically stating that Germany must rearm. Lord Hailsham, in the House of Lords, has warned Germany that if she persists in this way, sanctions will have to be applied. Internally there is one aggravation of the situation after the other; the bonfire, the Jewish disinheritance rules, etc. Financially we are at odds with them over the idea of transfer moratoria, etc., and they in turn are blocking the acceptance of our tariff truce after it had passed the French and British hurdles. They have gone mad with a vengeance.

Mr. Justice Brandeis asked the Secretary if he could come up to see him last night and proceeded to inveigh against the Administration for not coming out strongly on behalf of the Jews. The Secretary tried to point out that his whole policy was directed at easing the situation for the Jews in Germany as much as possible, but the Justice apparently brushed this consideration aside and said that what he was interested in was the United States coming out for its great traditional ideas of asylum against persecution, etc., etc. He quite convinced the Secretary, but if his idea is carried out and the President, following the example of Sir John Simon and others, makes a strong Anti-German speech, it would just be the last straw in our present strained relations and might provoke I do not know what complications.

May 12, 1933

Lunched with Colonel Watson, late Military Attaché, at Brussels. Returned to the Department to hear of the goodbye talk of Schacht with Bill Phillips. The former again proceeded to have one of his tantrums, walking up and down the room until he got red in the face, accusing us of giving aid and encouragement to the French in their exorbitant demands, and of closing our eyes to the national demands of 65,000,000 people, etc. He said that all he asked us was to keep hands off and let France and Germany settle their own trouble, but that if the world proceeded to hold Germany down there would be a smash. Making all allowances for the fact that his visit had been one of exceptional difficulty and that he has been spoken to in no uncertain terms by everybody concerning the policy of disaster which Germany is following, he has shown himself so unbending and domineering that there will be universal relief when he departs. With Schacht in Washington and Rosenberg in London receiving home truths from the American and British Governments, and with Italy giving them less and less support at Geneva, the isolation of Germany is virtually complete.

October 18, 1933

Mr. Carr asked me to come down to a conference he was having with Bernard Ridder of the Staatszeitung protesting against Nazi propaganda in the United States. He was a soft spoken, mild mannered individual, not at all the truculent sort that I had pictured from the days of the War when the Staatszeitung typified for me everything that was unfortunate. He, as a typical descendant of the Liberal Germans of 1848, is distressed beyond measure at events in Germany and more particularly the efforts of the Nazis to sew discord into the German-American societies in this country. The Nazis have sent over one Spanknoebel, a youngster of 27 but a spell-binding orator, to run their propaganda here. He claims Spanknoebel showed him credentials from Goebbels on the strength of which Spanknoebel ordered the Staatszeitung to adopt such and such policies, as a result of which he was politely ejected on to the street. Thereupon, he started to work through the German societies and by clever maneuvering succeeded in getting complete control, expelling the Jews, etc. The usual tactics are to take the three or four key men who have relatives in Germany and threaten them, if the bidding of the Nazis is not done, reprisals will be taken upon their German kin. By interviews with the Department of Labor they had discovered that some of these agitators were over-staying their permits and were subject to deportation. A search was being made through war-time statutes to see whether there was any possibility of suppressing this type of inflammatory propaganda. I had a feeling that it would be just as well if the Secretary would ask Luther pointblank whether Spanknoebel did have credentials from Goebbels, the answer to be stored away for future contingencies.

Lunched at the French Embassy. The Ambassador said that he had been anxious to come to the Department to talk over matters relating to Germany's withdrawal from the League and the Disarmament Conference, but had been too much afraid that the press would magnify the import of his call out of reason and cause embarrassment. He said that personally he understood the American position clearly and had telegraphed to his Government to the following effect: (1) that the American Government and people were a unit in pursuing the traditional policy of no entanglements; (2) that there was a strong anti-Nazi sentiment fostered not only by the Jews but by the old-fashioned German Americans; (3) that the Government did see eye to eye with the British and French on technical matters of disarmament and that there was no reason to suppose that there would be any change in this attitude.

He then remarked that he had read with surprise a despatch from Berlin appearing ⁱⁿ the NEW YORK TIMES to the effect that Chancellor Hitler had suggested to Ambassador Dodd that the United States might offer its services as mediator between the French and the Germans. He asked whether it was true and whether the Ambassador as reported was "optimistic". I told him that so far as I knew there was no truth in this story; that Chancellor Hitler had declaimed for some time on the difficulties and wrongs suffered by Germany but gave every indication that he was not interested in war.

The Ambassador expressed himself as very much in doubt as to what could be done to patch up the disarmament impasse. He said that the French, so far as he knew, were going to leave the next move up to Germany; that in his opinion the Germans could

not be expected to modify their position in any way before November 12, if then; that meanwhile the Conference was to meet on October 26 and he could not see what could be done at that time. Premier Daladier's political position he felt now to be reasonably secure. He had been afraid that Mr. Davis' statement would have a bad reception in the French press. He recognized that it was the misinterpretations of the French opposition press which had caused such a message, but none the less was relieved not to hear of any outburst or charge of desertion coming from the more irresponsible French quarters. After all, he said, as long as America maintains its unity of views with France and Britain on armament matters, that is all that can be asked.