

Summer Welles Papers
Box 211 Folder 4
Speeches & Writings
Moffat Diary 1939

January 3, 1939

Sumner Welles sent for me in the morning to tell of a telephone talk the night before with Myron Taylor. Myron Taylor had made three points: (1) He said that it was out of the question for him to suggest that Winterton step down as Chairman of the Committee in order to balance British and American influence by having an American Chairman and a British Director. He thought that as long as he remained as Vice Chairman and Pell as Vice Director no one could accuse the United States of "pulling out". As far as Pell was concerned he recognized that he should return to the United States in the summer and thought that his successor should come over two or three months in advance in order to learn the ropes. (2) The second thing he had on his mind was to urge once again that we cut out from Phillips' letter to Mussolini the idea of allowing emigrants from Germany to bring with them their equipment for colonization. He wanted to leave Rublee's hands completely free. Sumner Welles had replied that this was left in at the wish of the President himself. Mr. Taylor asked Welles to put it up to the President. This Sumner agreed to do but this morning he found a message that Bill Phillips was seeing Mussolini at seven o'clock Rome time, one o'clock Washington time. Sumner asked me whether I thought he should clear the matter with the President and perhaps telephone to Bill Phillips. I told him that I thought it was too late; in the first place it would take an hour or two to clear it through the White House, another hour to get it through to Rome, another half-hour to write the memorandum. More important, however, I felt it would be a mistake to

change the signals on Bill Phillips at the very last moment. He was dreading this interview and even while here was rehearsing his presentation almost as a set speech. I feared very much that a change of orders by telephone would detract from the effectiveness of his appeal. We therefore sent a brief wire to Taylor and Rublee pointing out that their recommendation arrived too late to be acted on, but assuring them that Phillips would emphasize that this point was only one phase of a problem. (3) The third point Mr. Taylor raised in his telephone talk was to say that the British were disturbed over the lack of response from New York to their Guiana offer. He urged very much that we again approach the Advisory Committee and ask them to expedite their survey of Guiana, meanwhile keeping an open mind. As a matter of fact, Isaiah Bowman and other geographers tell us that conditions are most unfavorable in Guiana and that to send a survey mission there would be a fool's errand. Nonetheless one cannot reject an offer without good cause and we were busy during the day trying to organize a survey.

In the evening I went to a small dinner for the Marquese of Lothian given by Arthur Krock. It was a stag dinner with the exception of one woman, Alice Longworth, who was asked so as to make Lord Lothian feel at home as Lady Astor was always present at the meetings of the "Clivedon set"! Present: the new Attorney General, Frank Murphy, a curiously shy type who gave me the impression that he should have been an ecclesiastic; Henry Wallace, John W. Haines, the new Under Secretary of the Treasury, Walter Lippmann and Turner Catledge.

Catledge tells me that the rearmament program and above all the neutrality legislation are going to be the subjects of bitter

controversy. He personally feels that a reaction is going to set in and that before the end of the session we will be back toward isolation. Beyond the Alleghenies the isolationists' sentiment is strong and the very first question that will be asked is "who is threatening us?" "Where and how?"

✓ Lord Lothian discussed foreign affairs exclusively. He said that Chamberlain's great blunder during the Munich crisis was to read aloud in the House of Commons the Hitler telegram agreeing to a Munich conference. The public demonstration of emotional relief was such that no government could have carried through a successful bluff after that. Had Chamberlain gone to Munich with the authority to declare war in his pocket he could have driven far better terms. As to "appeasement" he said that the idea was dead as far as Germany was concerned. Hitler's speech at Saarbrücken wherein he said he could not negotiate with democracies because there was an opposition which might eventually become the government plus the anti-Jewish outrages, were too much for public opinion. Chamberlain, Eden, the Liberals and Labor all saw alike as far as Germany was concerned. With Italy things were different. There was division of opinion with regard to Italian policy, but this difference started from the premise that Mussolini's mind was not irrevocably made up as was Hitler's. Nobody knew today whether Hitler would next turn east or west. For the moment his emotions were intensely hostile to Britain, but the German public did not want a war with Great Britain and Hitler would probably have to take that into account. Despite our horror of all Germany was doing however, Lord Lothian said that we should not overlook one positive factor - namely that Nazism was trying to integrate forces

!

REPRODUCED FROM HOLDINGS AT THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT LIBRARY

whereas the whole trend in Europe since the Reformation had been sub-division after sub-division into more and smaller political entities which were mutually self-destructive. He thought that Europe should ultimately contain four or five big systems instead of 25 or 26 small ones.

January 4, 1939

The Germans have at last answered our note saying that we could not admit a discrimination by a foreign country among American citizens and differentiation of treatment between them according to race or creed by denying that this was a recognized principle of international law. Nevertheless, the note did hold out a bridge by saying that each case brought to the attention of the German Government would be considered in accordance with the prevailing treaty obligations. Sumner Welles said that he would give no indication of the fact that the note had been received until we had a reply drafted. He asked if we could do this in a day. I told him "no", that to do a good job we would need at least two days. The build-up will be that whereas we do not accept their contention regarding international law, nonetheless our position is additionally protected by existing treaties and that in accordance with their suggestion we will bring to the attention of the Foreign Office all cases which are at variance therewith, whether we have taken them up with the competent local authorities in the past or not. We had a first draft prepared by late afternoon and worked over it in the evening.

The big event of the day of course was the President's speech. Even before he spoke the Germans indicated through their inspired press that if the President attacked Germany they would regard it as inviting a rupture of diplomatic relations. There was no mincing of words in his speech - rightly or wrongly he is leading the crusade against dictatorships. He has the press solidly behind him. He has to a large degree the urban population behind him, but it is not yet clear to what degree he has the great middle west with him.

REPRODUCED FROM HOLDINGS AT THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT LIBRARY

"Measures short of war" have been known to lead to war in the past.

I saw Victor Mallet at skating later in the afternoon and he was jubilant. His imagination was envisaging a power to do for England what the British Government has not been willing to do herself.

April 1 and 2, 1939

Saturday was a rather hectic day. In the first place the Secretary made the announcement of our recognition of Franco and preliminary reaction has been reasonably favorable. Franco is not popular here but the general feeling is that it would have been a mistake to ignore facts. One unhappy by-product fell upon Jimmy Dunn who had to telephone Hugh Gibson that he had been passed over for the Madrid Embassy. Hugh had set his heart on this and, furthermore, believed that he had an implied promise of the post from the President. Cardenas, the moment we announced recognition, jumped on a train and came down here and through his lawyers (Culbertson and LeRoy) asked immediate possession of the Embassy. We replied that until we had an answer from Burgos the recognition was not complete and we urged Culbertson to keep his client in his own interest from forcing the issue at the very last moment when everything was following its normal course.

Two other activities in connection with Spain: (1) a conference with Allen Dulles regarding the assets in this country of the National Bank of Spain; (2) the drafting of a telegram from the Secretary in reply to appeals being sent to him by Raymond Gram Swing, Dorothy Thompson, Albert Einstein and others to the effect that all the intelligentsia of Spain was about to be shot, and calling on him to stop it. The drafting was not easy and the interruptions were constant.

The French Ambassador called to ask us the reasons why we had recognized now, as de los Rios had erroneously given him the impression that we would delay action. I explained some of the reasons. He said he was very glad as the more the democratic States were represented at Madrid the greater would be their influence in combatting German and Italian domination.

May 4, 1939

The drafting of the Secretary's neutrality statement went on apace. It has reached the point which bothers me most - there is sufficiently general agreement on principle to make it no longer essential to have a meeting of eight or ten men to thresh out ideas. And eight or ten men trying to agree on language is an utter impossibility. I sat in for an hour and saw one paragraph approved. I was out of the room for an hour and a half and came back to find the group still working on the second paragraph.

Most of the day, however, I was engaged on refugee work. Mr. Myron Taylor came down to tell Sumner Welles and myself that he was distinctly disturbed over a visible tendency on the part of the Jewish leaders to back down in the formation of a refugee foundation and to claim that henceforth they should be in the minority both in members and in influence. This seemed to Mr. Taylor to be prompted by a fear that the Jewish community could not of itself raise sufficient funds. He felt that there should be a showdown, and that right soon. Personally he was inclined to the idea that instead of setting up a new organization we should make use of an organization already in existence. Sumner and the Secretary came in at the last moment, agreed, and Sumner went over to give the President this background before the formal meeting started in the afternoon.

At three o'clock I went over to the White House to attend the meeting between the President and Mr. Myron Taylor, Mr. James G. MacDonald, Judge Rosenman, Judge Proskauer, Mr. Lewis Strauss, Mr. Ittleson, Mr. Stroock, Mr. George Warren, Mr. Nathan Straus and Mr. Baerwald.

Mr. Taylor made the customary speech reporting on what had been done to date, and pointing out that he considered the setting up of the Refugee Foundation of utmost importance. In fact, he pointed out that Goering had as much as said that he had been given six months to come to an understanding with outside Jewry, and that if nothing had happened by the end of that time the authorities would chart another course. Sumner Welles then read the latest telegram from Geist indicating that in his opinion unless places of settlement were opened up very shortly the radicals would again gain control in Germany and try to solve the Jewish problem in their own way.

Judge Rosenman then recounted the efforts that had been made to set up the Foundation, pointing out the difficulties that had been encountered in reaching a meeting of minds, the fears that they might be condoning German persecution of their co-religionists, etc. He said that there was now universal agreement that the time had come to go ahead, but he made it clear that the Foundation should be interdenominational, with the Jews probably in a minority.

At this Mr. Taylor intervened, and said that while he agreed that the Foundation should be interdenominational, yet in all fairness he must point out that the greatest burden must be borne by the Jews, as it was largely their problem and their people who were in the greatest danger.

The President then pointed out that the conversation had convinced him of one essential fact - namely, that haste was essential. Perhaps some existing organization could be used which would obviate the long delays necessary to setting up a new body. As this was a new idea to most of those present, there was considerable emotion

REPRODUCED FROM HOLDINGS AT THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT LIBRARY

and all the disadvantages were brought out toward using a foreign organization, or a relief organization, or an organization with existing commitments. The President, however, stuck to his point, and said that in his opinion we should tell the Germans in a fortnight - not one day longer - that an organization was in existence which could deal with the German trust. It was not so much a question of the money as it was of actual lives, and the President was convinced that the warnings given by our Embassy in Berlin were sound and not exaggerated.

The group undertook to do their best. They adjourned to another room in the White House for a preliminary discussion, which was to be followed by a further meeting with Mr. Myron Taylor in New York next week.

September 6, 1939

Mr. Myron Taylor saw Sumner Welles, the Secretary, and ultimately the President. The latter is determined to go ahead with the October meeting lest the abandonment should spell the last word in discouragement to the refugees. Mr. Taylor is opposed on the theory that the top men could not come, a meeting with just the diplomatic representatives here who knew nothing about the problem would be worse than useless and that there were no practical plans in the President's mind or elsewhere to do anything during the emergency. However, he was overruled and the invitations are going forward.

REPRODUCED FROM HOLDINGS AT THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT LIBRARY

September 7, 1939

Little by little we are getting down to our war routine. We have a meeting each morning in the Secretary's office to talk over the type of problem that is most on his mind. This morning we discussed everything from credits for cotton to Spain, to submarines, ships, British blockades, contraband lists, European visa regulations, the extension of the embargo to Canada, etc.

September 20, 1939

The German Government has apparently served an ultimatum on Rumania that in addition to interning Marshal Smigly-Rydz it should intern the entire Polish Government. If this demand is not complied with Germany threatens to invade Rumania. The French and British who want to see the Polish Government established in France have protested violently at what they consider a "breach of international law." Rumania's apparent willingness to agree they characterize as a "despicable portrayal". Bill Bullitt has been so excited that he has been telephoning the White House. He virtually persuaded the President to protest to the Rumanian Government.

The Secretary sent for several of us, who had already gone home, to discuss the situation. I urged against any protest on the following grounds:

Let us assume that we protest; let us assume that as a result of our protest Rumania allowed the Polish Cabinet to depart; let us then assume that as a result Germany invaded Rumania. What would be our obligations to Rumania? Would we not have injected ourselves into the European fight, would not the immediate effect be to endanger the embargo appeal and the ultimate effect to involve us in war? In any event, these considerations prevailed and the upshot was, after a telephone talk between the President and the Secretary, to ask Gunther informally to inquire what was the attitude of the Rumanian Government toward this reported German demand.