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BLACK LIST AND BLOCKADE

INTERVIEW

WITH

**The Rt. Hon.
LORD ROBERT CECIL, M.P.**

**IN REPLY TO THE
SWEDISH PRIME MINISTER.**

LONDON: EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, LTD.

1916.

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IN REPLY TO THE

SWEDISH PRIME MINISTER.

October 5th, 1916.

I WAS received to-day by Lord Robert Cecil, who made the following observations to me upon the interview granted by the Prime Minister of Sweden to the Associated Press correspondent at Stockholm :—

“ I notice that the Swedish Prime Minister states that the action of Sweden has been dictated solely by considerations of that kingdom's own necessities and future welfare, and not by any partisan reasons. I hope it is not necessary for me to say that we fully appreciate reasons of this nature. We are fighting in this war to vindicate the rights of all nations to develop themselves freely, unhindered by the menace of military aggres-

sion. We ask no favours from neutrals. But we do ask that they should not hinder our belligerent rights in the life and death struggle which we and our Allies are waging.

“The Prime Minister further states that he is opposed to any mediation by Sweden at present, as this might compromise Germany, and arouse the suspicions of the Allies. As for Germany, I am not in a position to speak, but, for ourselves and Allies, I can say that we, who did not wish this war, and entered into it reluctantly, are determined, now we are in it, to obtain a victory which will ensure a lasting peace, by showing the enemy that wars of aggression will not be allowed to succeed.

“The Swedish Prime Minister goes on to say that he is in harmony with the American protest against the Black List, but I observe, with some surprise, that he makes no allusion to his attitude towards the American protests against the German submarine atrocities—surely a far graver matter for neutrals! The German submarine policy

is, in one aspect, an outrage on the commercial interests of neutral nations. Hundreds of neutral merchant vessels are now lying at the bottom of the sea. Thousands of tons of cargo have been destroyed, and all this without any pretence of judicial enquiry, and often for the flimsiest of reasons. Yet all this is the smallest part of the evil which has been thus wrought. Peaceful citizens of all countries and of both sexes have been foully murdered at the bidding of German militarism. Others have been mutilated. Others have been exposed in open boats to the fury of the seas. It is strange that these matters should have been forgotten.

“As to the merits of the Black List controversy, I have explained before that the Black List is an attempt to prevent British subjects trading with enemy firms or with firms that trade in the enemy interest. That the Swedish Prime Minister or any neutral should claim to compel British firms, when their country is engaged in a life and death

struggle, to help enemy trade, is a claim for which there is no precedent and which cannot be admitted. For the British Government to prevent its own subjects from helping the enemy, violates no rule of law, equity, or morals, and is an elementary precaution taken in the interests of national safety.

“ With regard to the commercial measures taken against trade with Germany through Sweden, Great Britain and her Allies are at one in their determination to use their naval forces for the purpose of preventing the import of goods to enemy countries. No one, surely, can complain of that. It is impossible for us to permit the unrestricted import of goods to neutral countries, by which such neutral countries would become channels of supply to the enemy. At the same time we are, and have always been, most anxious to facilitate the import into neutral countries, including Sweden, of all goods needed for their home requirements, allowing for the normal development of their industries, provided that satisfactory guarantees are obtained,

either from importers or from some Government body, that the goods will not, in any form, be re-exported to the enemy. It follows that the unrestricted import of goods, which would release home products of a similar nature for exportation, cannot be agreed to by us. That is, indeed, for all practical purposes, the same thing as importing goods through Sweden into Germany. The trader profits by the high prices prevailing in enemy countries which are caused by the blockade, and, at the same time, imports goods through the blockade, which are purchased at a lower price, to replace the home produce which is sold to our enemies. Such a traffic cannot be supported on any equitable ground.

“ The guarantees against re-exportation, which His Majesty’s Government ask for to safeguard their interests, are, therefore :—

“ (1) That the quantities imported should be restricted to the known requirements of Swedish home consumption.

“ (2) That there should be a prohibition of export, of such goods, which is not rendered ineffective by the grant of licences.

“ (3) That the importer shall afford effectual guarantees against re-export in any form.

“ How these objects can best be secured without injury to genuine neutral trade is, no doubt, a problem. We have been always anxious for a friendly discussion of it with the Swedish Government or Swedish Traders. We believe that the best plan is for importation to be undertaken and controlled either by a Central Association, which would distribute the goods to regular and reliable importers (and so prevent the accumulation of stocks in the hands of ‘jobbers,’ for the purpose of driving up prices), or, alternatively, by Associations of traders interested in separate industries. We have, however, always been prepared to assent to any other plan by which the above principles could be secured. There can be little doubt that if

a general arrangement on the above lines, or special arrangements for particular commodities, could be arrived at, it would have the effect of steadying prices, of enabling regular importers to obtain their requirements, of avoiding delays for shipping, and of preventing the speculation which is now rife to the detriment of the people at large."

In conclusion, Lord Robert added: "We showed our willingness to arrive at an agreement by the negotiations we entered into with Sweden last year—negotiations which, unfortunately, from no lack of goodwill on our part, did not result in an agreement. We have been, and we are, ready to consider the matter afresh, with every desire to take into account the normal requirements of Sweden, and to make allowances for all cases in which her requirements are now greater than before the war owing to the development of her industries. But for any negotiations to be successful, there must be a co-operation by both parties. Unless we can get full information from Swedish sources as to home

requirements and the conditions of trade, no agreement can be come to. I do hope that our Swedish friends will recognise this, and will approach the matter in a frank, business-like way, not suspecting us of any *arrière pensée*, but believing, what is the truth, that we are anxious to restore to its old footing the ancient friendship and commercial intercourse of the two countries.”

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