Berlin, Germany, November 3, 1933.

SUBJECT: Some observations on the action of the German Government in withdrawing from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, and on the election of November 12, 1933.

THE HONORABLE
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit the following comment on the action of the German Government in withdrawing from the League of Nations and from the Disarmament Conference, and on the election as to be held on November 12, 1933, in consequence of this action.

While the action of the German Government came as a surprise to the League and to the Disarmament Conference, it is I believe interesting and significant to note that it came as a surprise as well to the German people and even to most of those in the immediate entourage of the Chancellor, Mr. Hitler. The proceedings at the Disarmament Conference were watched with the greatest interest by a considerable part of the thinking people in Germany, as the recognition of so-called equality is undoubtedly something in which all
all thinking Germans are interested. This issue has been pushed into the foreground by the present Government as it knew that it would find a responsive echo in practically every German. The agitation which has been continuously carried on for months to stimulate interest in so-called airprotection in Germany, and the very general feeling which has been aroused even among intelligent people that the country is being threatened by air attacks from every side and is defenseless against it, and the emphasis by the Government on the fact that France and certain other countries have not only increased their armaments but are planning to further increase them, have aroused a feeling of resentment and injustice, and one may say I believe with correctness that in this one question the German people are a unit, irrespective of what their attitude towards the present Government and the National-Socialist party may be. From my conversations I am of the opinion that the German people as a whole do not desire war and that, if the activities of the present Government have for their basis the desire to stimulate an offensive, war-like attitude of the German people, they have so far failed. On the other hand, if the Government has been deliberately planning its propaganda within the country in order to prepare the people for such action as the withdrawal from the League and the Disarmament Conference
Conference, it has been eminently successful. It was obvious, however, from the conversations which I have had during the past few months that the thinking people had great hopes that some form of recognition of equality would be arrived at with authorization to make some slight increases in the military equipment of the country.

What the leaders of the National-Socialist party and of the Government have actually had in mind, I am not in a position to say, but there is much reason to believe that among the inner groups of the party the question of withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference has been a live issue and in their minds as the most effective means of either forcing action in their favor by other countries, or of relieving Germany of any obligation which they may have, so as to enable the party and the Government to go ahead with the rearmament of Germany. That there has been such pressure towards rearmament cannot be doubted, but it has come from a very small group within the party and there is much reason to believe that certain of the industrialists of the country have been urging such action in order to stimulate the groups of industry which they control.

From the information which is available, however, to me I do not believe it is likely that the German delegation want to Geneva with the object of withdrawing
withdrawing from the Disarmament Conference and the League. When the final impasse was reached at Geneva and the German delegation realized that it could not carry away from Geneva the satisfactory results which they hoped to get, the situation was still perhaps not entirely lost, but I am informed that it was the conversation which Sir John Simon had with Dr. Goebbels the afternoon of the departure of the latter, which really precipitated the crisis. In this conversation Sir John Simon is said to have informed Dr. Goebbels that under no circumstances could the British Government support any increase in armaments of Germany until it could feel satisfied that it could place greater confidence in the promises of the present German Government. It is said that Sir John made it clear to Dr. Goebbels that up to now the British Government could not approve of the acts of the Hitler regime and could not depend upon its assurances with respect to its will for peace, but that the British Government would have to await more favorable developments in the German situation. It seems that the conversation was very frank, and direct and unequivocal on the part of Sir John, and that Dr. Goebbels himself said very little, but that he left the conversation furious with anger and resentment. He immediately determined to go to Berlin by plane although he distrusts air travel and avoids it whenever possible. I happened
to have been on the Tempelhof field in Berlin awaiting the arrival of Senator McAdoo in the plane from Russia, and a few minutes before the arrival of his plane that of Dr. Goebbels arrived from Geneva. The usual crowd was gathered to meet him, but I was informed the next day by one of my National-Socialist friends who was there to meet him, that Dr. Goebbels was evidently in a very bad frame of mind and hardly paid any attention to his friends who were there to meet him, but immediately hurried to a conference with the Chancellor. I am informed by responsible persons that the decision to leave the League and the Disarmament Conference was arrived at already that evening in the conference between the Chancellor and Dr. Goebbels.

I believe that in order to appreciate the rapidity with which this decision was reached, one must not fail to consider the extraordinary mentality, fanaticism and precipitateness of both the Chancellor and Dr. Goebbels. Dr. Goebbels is more in accord with the Chancellor on the Jewish and certain other primary questions of the National-Socialist movement than any other of the primary leaders of the party. They are both exceedingly prejudiced and are capable of deep-seated animosities. Both of them are exceedingly narrow-minded and ignorant of real conditions in the rest of the world and of the mentalities of other peoples than the German. They are both inclined to be passionate
and fanatic. It is unquestionable that Dr. Goebbels suffered keenly as a result of the conversation with Sir John Simon. Anyone who knows him realizes that it would be intolerable to him that a Jew should speak to him as Sir John is said to have done and should transmit to him the attitude of Great Britain. They would feel that the attitude on German equality was being determined by a Jew supported by what he chooses to call a world-wide movement of the Jews against Germany. As this question is also one on which the Chancellor feels exactly the same and has the same fundamental resentments and prejudices, it is understandable that Dr. Goebbels would find a willing ear.

(While I am not personally aware whether Sir John is a Jew or not, he has been constantly referred to as such by the controlled press in Germany, and on the basis of conversations which I have had with people in the Government and in the party, I take it that he is obviously considered by them as such.) I am not able to vouch for the entire correctness of the statement, but as I have already said I am reliably informed that the decision to leave the League was formed the same evening of the arrival of Dr. Goebbels from Geneva. The actual conversations with Mr. von Neurath, the Foreign Minister, did not take place until the following day.

As an interesting sidelight on this decision I may mention that I have been informed by a most reliable source that when the Italian Ambassador here called on the
the Chancellor to convey a message on behalf of Mussolini, the interview was on the part of the Chancellor a stormy and extraordinary one. It seems that the precipitate departure of Dr. Goebbels from Geneva disturbed the Italian delegation which knew what advice Dr. Goebbels was going to give to the Chancellor. Immediately, the Italian Ambassador in Berlin was instructed by Mussolini to call on Hitler and to state that the German action in leaving the League and the Disarmament Conference would be looked upon with the greatest regret and concern by the Italian Government. It seems that Hitler immediately became furious and reproached the Italian Ambassador that Mussolini was deserting him, that he was jealous because fascism had never had world influence and that National-Socialism was the real fascism which was having an influence throughout the world. He is said to have alternately wept and shouted during the interview, and the Italian Ambassador when he left the room is said to have declared to the people in the anteroom: "Children, I don't know whether you know it, but your chief is unbalanced." I do not have this story directly from the Italian Ambassador, but I have it from a practically first-hand and unimpeachable source. I have only recited it to indicate that there is much reason to believe that the decision to leave the League and the Disarmament Conference was made on the basis of prejudices and in the heat of anger and resentment.

In this connection it is further interesting to note
note that several days after the decision had been announced, one of my friends who is important in the party councils asked me what my reaction was over Germany's action. I told him that an official reaction I could not give him because I did not know the attitude of my Government and had no authority to speak for it and that my personal reaction was not worth anything. He insisted on having my personal reaction; so I told him that in my opinion it was very unwise for them to leave the League and that the action in leaving the Disarmament Conference was taken much too hurriedly and precipitately, and apparently at a time when those who made it were not in a position to reflect. To this my friend replied: "But the Chancellor had every reason to be angry and upset." To this I replied that it was all none of my concern, but that I would view it a grave danger to my own country if decisions of such great moment were made by our chief of state in the heat of passion, and that it did not seem desirable that decisions affecting so seriously the future of sixty-five millions of people should be made so quickly. To this my friend could reply in no other way than by saying that Hitler had had a right to be angry. To those in the entourage of the Chancellor anything which he does is right.

The declaration of the withdrawal, however it may have been arrived at, was met with popular approval. If Dr. Goebbels persuaded the Chancellor to take this action without due consideration, he has certainly also
also assisted him in putting the action before the German people in a way so as to arouse practically unanimous approval. I have not heard a single German, even among those who are directly opposed to the National-Socialist party, who does not approve of the action of the Government. The way had already been carefully prepared for such action, and the proclamation of the Government and the first appeal of the Chancellor which appeared in the papers of October 14, showed the clever head of Dr. Goebbels and assured from the outset popular approval. Simultaneously with the publication of the German action appeared articles derogatory of Sir John Simon and attacking him in various ways. It is understood that Dr. Goebbels had issued instructions that Simon was to be attacked, but that England was to be treated gently. The instructions to attack Simon were very quickly recalled by the Propaganda Ministry. I mention this as it has an interesting bearing on the assumed fact, and apparently tends to substantiate that Goebbels was largely influenced in his action by personal resentment against Sir John. Dr. Goebbels is a great exponent of "the truth" and speaks always loudly and long about it, but it is the one thing which he cannot bear to have told to him.

I am not able to give to the Department all of the reasons which impelled the Government to call an election on November 12. It is evident, however, that it is a very clever political move, for, by having the people
people vote on the question as to whether they support the Government in this question of the demand for equality and its will for peace, on which the German people will give only one answer, they had at the same time the opportunity to have an election for a Reichstag of which all the members belonged to one party. Germany could then face the world with the statement that on this question of equality and a will for peace the whole German people were united, and that the entire legislative body without a dissenting voice was behind the Government. The election, although the move is undoubtedly a clever one and is said to be the conception of Dr. Goebbels whose extraordinarily creative mind in matters of this kind is always the principal resource of the party, is as hollow and insincere as so many of the campaign speeches which have been made since the announcement of the election. There can under present conditions in Germany be no such thing as a free election, and to elect a Reichstag when the Government has definitely and continuously openly declared that parliamentary Government is at an end, is in itself a fair indication of the dependence which can be placed in the sincerity of the Government and of the party leaders in so many things. Within the past few months in practically all party speeches emphasis has been placed upon the fact that parliamentary government in Germany is finished and that only the "Fuehrer"-principle remains.

In the "Berliner Tageblatt" of November 1 there is given
given a facsimile of the two tickets which will be given to every voter (enclosure No. 1). The first ticket will be a white one and will be for the popular vote in support or against the Government on the question: "Do you, German man, and do you, German woman, agree with the policy of the German Government, and are you ready to declare it as the expression of your opinion and your will, and to swear to it solemnly?" Below this question there are two squares within which there is a circle, marked respectively "yes" and "no". The voter is to put a cross in the appropriate circle. It is interesting to note that on the ticket itself there is no statement as to what the voter is actually expressing an opinion on. The election was announced as one in which the voters will say whether they agree with the policy of the Government in its fight for equality of armaments, German honor and expression of the will for peace. In the election speeches, however, while these three have been emphasized, it is also constantly emphasized that the German people must show that they are a unit, and as a unit behind the Government. It is obvious therefore that on the basis of the ticket which will be submitted to the voter and which he will use, and on the basis of the campaign it will be very easy for the Government to state that the German people are a unit behind the present Government in all of its policies.

The second ticket which is to be given to every voter is a green one and is for the Reichstag election. It is
the ticket of the National-Socialist party and the names of the candidates will appear. There is place for a cross in the circle, but the voter has the opportunity to vote only one ticket and for one set of candidates. The casting of such a vote can therefore in no sense of the word be construed as the exercise of an election privilege or as an expression of free opinion.

I am told that the ballot boxes are so arranged that the tickets fall in the boxes in order, and as a list of the voters is kept in the order in which they cast their votes, it will be as easy to determine how the individual voter marked his ticket as though his name were signed to it. As every German is familiar with the close supervision exercised over the voting and as the supervision over the population is so close by the party, it is doubtful whether even a small percentage of Germans will dare to stay away from the polls, and those who will go to the polls will all vote in one way. As the people have learned that the abstention from complete obedience to party orders may result in all kinds of personal persecution, any talk of a free election is, to put it plainly, farcical. In the "Berliner Tageblatt" of November 3 there appears an article (enclosure No. 2) entitled "Protection of the Voter", calling attention to the fact that the Minister of the Interior has decreed that the fullest protection shall be given to the people.
people at the polls. This is again a farce as there is no reason why there should be any disturbance or interference with people at the polls. There is no party struggle and there is no possibility of campaigning against the Government or the party, and to speak of "protecting the voter" at the polls on November 12 is merely another indication of the totally insincere methods used by the Government.

Although there is in reality no election in the sense of the word that we understand it at home and in other countries, a regular election campaign is being carried on and huge mass meetings are being held all over the country, at which Hitler, Goering and Goebbels are the principal speakers. It would be impossible within the limits of this despatch to give a resume of the speeches, but the following brief references may be of interest:

The Chancellor in his speech at Kelheim in Bavaria on October 23, said:

"We wish peace, but the world must know that this eternal discrimination and taking away of the honor of our people cannot be borne by us. We do not wish anything else than our quiet and our peace in order that we can work, and the world shall know that for this work the whole nation will hold together, every man, every woman, down to the youngest. This, however, is clear to us that a life such as the one which we have had for the last fifteen years is in the long run so little for our people endurable as it would be endurable for any other people."

In a speech which Dr. Goebbels made in Frankfurt on the Oder on October 23, he said:

"National
"National-Socialism is a typically German manifestation. When it is alleged that the economic situation has in no way improved, this is by no means the major consideration, but on the contrary it is much more important that the German people again believe and hope. --- The National-Socialist Government has only one wish, and that is to be left in peace as it has enough to do in its own country. We can make no concessions, however, in connection with our honor, for honor is the basis of the being of every people. --- We are prepared again to sit at the council tables with other countries if equality is acknowledged. This moment must come, for without Germany the world cannot live. Therefore National-Socialism has paved the way for a new Europe."

The active campaign for the elections was opened by the Chancellor on the evening of October 24 in Berlin. In his speech he showed the influence of the feelings with which he was overpowered. When speaking of the foreign correspondents he used harsh and undignified language, which was not quoted in any of the so-called "full" reports of the speech in the German press. As I believe that the Department has full accounts of this speech, I shall not go into it any further.

On October 25 the Chancellor spoke again in Hannover. In this speech he repeated his previous statements that Germany desires peace with all the world. He again referred to the so-called hatred and opposition to Germany which had been built up in the rest of the world. He said:

"The one thing that we must desire is that the whole world realizes that not only they have honor, not only England, not only France need have regard for their honor, but we also. --- I have more than once solemnly assured the world that we really desire understanding, that we have an honest desire to go together with other peoples. To this assurance I need add nothing, for I believe that a war would be folly for Europe. --- If the world wishes to see us at all, it must acknowledge our right to equality, and if it does not acknowledge our right to equality, then we shall"
"shall be very sorry, but will withdraw ourselves."

In Stettin on October 25, Minister President of Prussia Goering spoke, and according to the "Berliner Tageblatt"

"sharply directed himself against parliamentary government and the pacifism of the last ten years the root of which has been cowardice. Through parliamentary government no one can build a new state. Germany is again fighting for its rights, for respect and prestige. If we succeed in this, Germany is saved. If we fail, Germany remains a slave."

On October 26, the Chancellor spoke in Cologne in the following sense:

"The world must know that when I declare that we desire peace and conciliation, even with our former enemies, the whole German people are prepared to recognize this policy of freedom as theirs. I will not waver, and you will show the world that the German people are no longer indecisive. On the 12th of November you will make your profession for Germany, for our honor, for our equal rights, and in this way for a real and lasting peace in the world."

On October 27, in Kiel Minister President Goering said:

"This time you will decide whether Germany shall be free or whether we shall remain Helots. We wish to show foreign countries on the 12th of November that we have become one people."

On the same evening Dr. Goebbels spoke in Dresden and as usual laid emphasis on the Jewish question, repeating in the bitterest terms of the alleged activities of German emigrants in foreign countries. He finally dismissed this question by saying:

"With respect to the Jewish question, we have solved that part of it which could be solved, and then we have laid it away in the dossier."
In his speech in Breslau on November 1, Minister President Goering said:

"In former times foreign countries could always reckon with the weakness of our Governments who were even in financial dependence on them. We have the rest of the world even much more against us now than before, and only one ground: because Germany wants to take her place under the sun and because Hitler has made a people. We do not desire war. We know war. We know what responsibility we have. Hitler, when he decided our departure from the League of Nations, knew what terrible responsibility he was taking, but he knew that the honor of his people was more to be desired and stood above all other things. The struggle concerns three things: Honor, Freedom and Blood."

In the speech of the Vice Chancellor von Papen on November 2 in Essen, he is quoted as having said:

"The dear, heavenly Father has blessed Germany in that in a time of deepest need He has given it a leader who will lead her over all difficulties and weaknesses, through all crises and dangers with the sure instinct of the statesman, into a happy future."

The Vice Chancellor was followed at Essen by the Chancellor who made in his speech one of the most significant and frankest expressions he has made during the campaign. He is quoted in the "Berliner Tageblatt" of November 3 as having said:

"When in those November days of 1918 the German people hid down their arms it was not because they had the feeling that they had committed a wrong, for we must again and again freely and openly declare to the world that the German people remained unconvinced and cannot be convinced that they have to carry the guilt of the awful war, and we must declare that the German people were convinced and are convinced that their signature to the acknowledgement of the war guilt came out of fear and under the pressure of unexampled coercion."

In
In a speech in Karlsruhe on November 3 Dr. Goebbels is quoted as having said:

"We have never raised a demand for arms. Our request has always been that as we have disarmed the rest of the world shall also disarm."

The Consulate General has had it brought to its attention from several sources that the speeches which are made by the leaders of the party, are not correctly reported in the press. Their tone is very much quieter and the rough wording used in the speeches is smoothed down in the published reports. Consul General Dominian in a letter to the Ambassador, dated November 1, brings to his attention that the Chancellor's Stuttgart speech was much smoothed down in the press and that the coarse language directed against the so-called emigrants, and with regard to the provisions of the Versailles Treaty were hardly recognizable in the published reports. I personally heard part of the Chancellor's opening campaign speech which was rabid and uncontrolled, but which in the published reports appeared quite mild.

It seems that one need not be much of a prophet to say that there will be an overwhelming vote on November 12 which will be interpreted as endorsement and support of the Government, when as a matter of fact it will merely be the expression of the resentment of the German people on the question of the equality of armaments. That the whole has been cleverly managed and that the stage-setting has been unparalleled, is due
due very largely to the genius of the Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda. Whether the blanket endorsement which the Government and the Party will assume for themselves, will be utilized by the radical members of the party to bring about certain reorganizations in the Ministries, is not certain. That these radical elements will endeavor to do this, is certain. That they will be able to do it, is not so clear. If after the November elections no radical changes take place in some of the higher positions in the Ministries, it will be a favorable sign that certain progress towards stability which had been noticeable, is continuing. If on the other hand the changes take place under radical pressure, it will mean that the ultimate solution of the political situation will be delayed by three or four months more.

The question as to the action which Germany will take in actually increasing its armaments as a result of the November 12 elections, is one which I hope to be able to cover in another despatch in the near future.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith,
American Consul General.