

(Translation.)

THE French Government does not regret any less than His Majesty's Government that they have been compelled to decide upon the breaking off of diplomatic relations between themselves and a Government with which they have been united up to so recent a date by a close alliance.

They would nevertheless have wished that the memory of that close alliance and a just appreciation of the immense sacrifices which France has made as a contribution to the common war and of the tremendous services which its forces have rendered to Great Britain on land, on sea and in the air and finally the realisation of the unhappy plight in which a vanquished ally found itself should have deterred His Majesty's Government from undertaking the repeated acts of aggression which have compelled the Government of the Republic to break off diplomatic relations with them.

The reasons for this measure are so evident, and so urgent that there is hardly need to recall them.

On the 3rd July a British squadron, formed and despatched with this end in view, arrived in the harbour of Mers-el-Kebir and surprised, bottled up and attacked a French squadron which was at anchor there, in course of being disarmed, and which was not in a position to defend itself, after having presented it with an ultimatum of which the terms were unacceptable for any commander bearing the responsibility for a naval force and which, moreover, were incompatible with the conditions of an armistice which the French Government could not think of contravening. This act of aggression caused about 1,200 victims, dead and seriously wounded, among French sailors who up till the preceding week had been the companions in arms of the British sailors under whose blows they fell.

On the same day British forces seized by surprise at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Southampton French warships which had come to seek refuge in these British ports after having rendered vital services over a period of ten months to Great Britain and of which some had been damaged in the course of their naval campaigns at sea. The French Admiral who commanded them had been previously arrested and separated from his staff officers.

Similarly on the 3rd July the units of our fleet stationed at Alexandria were compelled to surrender to the British Fleet, and a French sloop was torpedoed without warning by a British submarine on the coast of Algeria.

Two days later British seaplanes came to finish off the destruction of a French battleship which was aground in the harbour of Mers-el-Kebir, and they did not hesitate to machine-gun the sailors and workmen both on the bridge of the wreck which was being bombarded and in the boats in which they were hastening from its decks. This new attack caused serious losses, both dead and wounded, in all, 200 victims, in addition to the 1,200 of the 3rd July.

Such are the facts which have compelled the Government of the Republic to break off diplomatic relations with His Majesty's Government. Your Excellency knows that since then another similar act has been carried out off Dakar and must be added to the list of attacks by the British fleet against the French fleet. Your Excellency knows that also since that date even mail boats of the French merchant marine have been seized at sea or in port by the British navy in violation of all laws, unless perhaps of the laws of war, of which His Majesty's Government have thus been making arbitrary use against their former Ally without being at war with them.

Like His Majesty's Government the French Government would not wish to aggravate by a useless controversy a situation the gravity of which causes them deep concern, although they do not bear the responsibility for it. The French Government must nevertheless draw your Excellency's attention to the fact that the hostile acts which His Majesty's Government have committed are entirely unjustifiable.

In point of fact the surrender of the French war fleet to Germany or Italy is not provided for in any of the stipulations of the armistice conventions. On the contrary the naval clauses of these conventions expressly laid down that this fleet would remain French property and could in no case be used against Great Britain. The ships were to be disarmed under the control of German and Italian commissions whose mandate was limited to the observation and verification of their disarmament. These disarmament operations were to render the ships unusable for purposes of war unless repairs were undertaken which