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America and The War

By A. MAURICE LOW, in "National Review"

THE Note sent by the Washington Government to the British Government on the 26th of December protesting against the seizure of ships and the detention of American cargoes on suspicion of being contraband intended for enemy purposes...

Through the pages of this Review and the columns of the "Morning Post" it is difficult, it may be admitted, to make the average person understand that belligerents have rights no less than neutrals...

"There is always the danger that business men and working men, suffering from the effects of the war in the falling off of trade and the scarcity of employment, will be made to believe that Britain, and not Germany, is responsible for their distress...

The foregoing paragraph was written on October 5 last and appears in the November issue of the "National Review." Now read the American Note.

"There is an increasing belief, doubtless not entirely unjustified, that the present British policy toward American trade is responsible for the depression in certain industries which depend upon European markets.

"In the December issue of the Review, writing almost two months before the American protest was despatched, I said:

"A sentiment hostile to us could be easily created because there are bound to rise questions of vital importance to Americans. So long as the war lasts we shall be compelled to interfere with their shipping and to disturb their commerce, no doubt causing them heavy losses.

"In substantiation of this view the President writes—or at least authorizes to be officially written—to the British Government:

"Not only is the situation a critical one to the commercial interests of the United States, but many of the great industries of this country are suffering because their products are denied long-established markets in European countries, which, though neutral, are contiguous to the nations at war.

stood. I find in talking to men and women of more than average intelligence that they resent the idea which is undoubtedly prevalent, that we have resorted to arbitrary methods and created a code of our own which so many people believe, is as flagrant a violation of the law of nations as Germany's violation of the neutrality of Belgium.

What is uppermost in the American mind at the present time is that certain "rights," which he believes are inherently his, have been trampled upon. He is rather vague as to what those rights are. His ideas are nebulous and inchoate.

"Our sincere desire to avoid anything approaching ill-feeling does not mean that we are willing to retreat from our unquestioned rights as a neutral Power. The law of contraband contains a large borderland of doubt. But it leaves the broad right of neutrals unimpaired.

"Britain enjoys the command of the sea. True, but that does not make her whim the law at sea. The rules carefully worked out through all the years, with the decisions made by British courts as well as American and the positions laid down repeatedly by British statesmen as well as our own, cannot be brushed aside as if they were but scraps of paper.

"When newspapers that hope for the success of the Allies so stoutly assert Britain has exceeded her legitimate powers, one can very well imagine what the comment is of newspapers that are pro-German or indifferent to British success.

"It is a great pity that some of the energy and space that were used to answer German arguments about the responsibility for the war were not employed to deal with questions of more practical interest to Americans.

"The Germans accuse Mr. Wilson of favoring the Allies because he did nothing to prevent the exportation of munitions of war sanctioned by international law, and they resented his refusal to receive delegations who wanted to enlist his support in behalf of the relief of the Belgians.

for the relief of the Belgians. I think if they had been told that by stopping a single cargo of copper to Germany the war would be over, that much sooner and the necessity of furnishing food to the distressed Belgians would be to that extent lightened, they would have shown less objection to the necessarily rigorous measures Britain was forced to adopt.

"The President dwells upon the injury that has been done to American trade. I think it is unfortunate that the American people have not been made to understand that this injury has been brought about by Germany and not because Britain has been required to search ships and confiscate contraband.

"Many Britishers will no doubt ask whether American sympathy for Britain is less pronounced now than it was at the beginning of the war. Sentiments in the United States are still heavily in favor of the Allies, but it is not so one-sided as it was, I believe. With the breaking out of hostilities Germany did so many foolish and outrageous things that Americans were disgusted and horrified, and public opinion was quickly formed.

"International law, we are now discovering to our cost, is not a legal code and cannot be internationally enforced. It ties the hands of nations willing to respect it and frees from obligation those without conscience.

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