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RUSSIA No. 3 (1923).

REPLY

OF

Soviet Government to His Majesty's Government

RESPECTING

The Relations between the Two Governments.

(In continuation of "Russia No. 2 (1923)." Cmd. 1869.)

Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.



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**Reply of Soviet Government to His Majesty's
Government respecting the Relations between
the two Governments.**

[In continuation of "Russia No. 2 (1923)." Cmd. 1869.]

*Mr. Hodgson to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston.—(Received
May 13.)*

(Telegraphic.)

Moscow, May 13, 1923.

FOLLOWING is text of note :—

"In reply to memorandum handed by you to me on 8th May, I would request you to bring to knowledge of your Government the following :—

"1. Although European reaction, which has been gaining strength during last few months, directed against working classes and accompanied as ever by a growing enmity towards Soviet republics, affords ground for apprehending steps against republics of workers and peasants, nevertheless memorandum of British Government, having character of an ultimatum and threatening breaking off peaceful economic relations between the two States equally interested in the development of peaceful co-operation, was for the Soviet Government greatest surprise on account of its sharp and unjustified hostility. Ultimatum and threats are not a way to settle private relations, unimportant misunderstandings between States; in any case establishment of correct relations with Soviet republics is not attainable by this means.

"2. Russian Republic undoubtedly appreciated circumstance that Great Britain of all Great Powers was first to conclude an agreement with her, although of a temporary and insufficient character. Russian Government took this fact into consideration in its relations with Great Britain, and also in its negotiations with other Powers, although, at the same time, it cannot but recognise that agreement was far from yielding benefits to only one of the parties thereto, and that from agreement Great Britain also drew both political and economic benefits, that establishment of peaceful relations with Soviet republics is a most necessary factor for peace and for re-establishment of economic well-being of all countries of Europe in which to no small extent Great Britain is interested. Tremendous significance of appearance on European market of Russian raw material, export of which, having commenced only quite recently, has already had time to grow considerably, and is increasing every month, and consequent reduction in price of bread, kerosene, timber, linen, manufactures, &c., for populations of all countries of Europe, including England, is now challenged by nobody.

"3. Russian Government is not inclined to deny that present relations indicated in British memorandum are abnormal and existing basis of agreement insufficient. On its part it has always striven for full regularisation of relations, for frank discussion of all questions separating the two States, and for establishment of a firmer basis which would to the maximum degree exclude possibility of

friction and conflicts. It must, however, point out that present unsatisfactory basis of agreement was chosen by Great Britain herself. But even within the bounds of this agreement, Great Britain has unfortunately always avoided practical discussion of the whole of the complex questions in dispute between the two sides and established such a form of relationship as has made difficult and in many cases impossible a satisfactory settlement of conflicts arising from time to time.

" 4. Memorandum of British Government speaks of numerous challenges which Soviet Russia has thrown British Government as though with deliberate intention. Soviet Government permits itself the assertion of complete baselessness of such statement and regrets that British Government did not find it possible to mention even one single case of such challenge before the occurrence of the conflicts directly preceding present exchange of memoranda. Soviet Government on its part is prepared to adduce not a few cases during last two years of actual challenges on the part of British Government, not only to Soviet Government, but also to whole Russian people, of its sympathy with whom British Government has thought fit to allude in their ultimatum. It is sufficient to recall universally known disregard for interests of Soviet Russia exhibited by British Government in settlement of large number of international questions, as for instance questions of Straits, Eastern Galicia, Memel, Bessarabia, &c.

" 5. If Soviet Government has not had recourse to notes and protest concerning infringement of Anglo-Russian Agreement, it is not at all, because it has not at its disposal sufficient material on which to found such protests, but because it has not lost hope of general settlement of all questions in dispute and at issue. It is, however, forced to state that it has plenty of reports and documents pointing to intense activity of agents of British Government against interests of republics in Caucasus and in particular in localities bordering on Central Asian parts of Soviet republics, to support given to bandit and Bassi movement in Turkestan and Eastern Bokhara, to assistance given by British consul to White Guard in recruiting officers and sending them to Vladivostok during its occupation by Whites. In referring to these facts, Soviet Government is far from any intention of bringing them forward as accusations against British Government, but desires merely to show that, striving to preserve peaceful relations with Great Britain and not to provoke conflicts, it did not consider it possible to base its protests upon reports of informers and intercepted documents, genuineness of which in such circumstances must always be under some suspicion. Similar material is at disposal of all Governments, and if they use them for creating conflicts and as a foundation for protests, then friendly relations between any two Governments could hardly exist.

" 6. Unfortunately, British Government finds it possible to utilise in official communications dubious data of such a description regarding Soviet republics. It is necessary to recall that already in 1921, only five months after conclusion of Anglo-Russian Agreement, Ministry for Foreign Affairs produced a lengthy memorandum, with accusations against Russian Government, based

exclusively on information of character above described. Russian Government was then able to show that British Government themselves were led into error by greed of irresponsible and evil-minded informers, and to point out muddy source whence were furnished apocryphal documents intended to compromise Russian Government. British Government foresee in their memorandum possibility of our challenging new materials on which they base their new accusation, and thereby deprive Russian Government of possibility of entering into a detailed analysis of facts communicated in memorandum. Russian Government, not desiring by its silence to give ground for assertion that it even indirectly confirms genuineness of these facts, considers it necessary to declare that extracts and quotations brought forward by British Government are combination of invention, with decyphered parts of telegrams tendenciously manipulated and arbitrarily extended. Russian Government definitely declares that quotations referring to Persia are pure inventions, and bear no relation to any official documents in knowledge of Russian Government. Characteristic example of tendenciously distorted communication is provided in reference to telegram of Raskolnikof, where mention is made of assistance of Wasiristan to extent of 3,000 roubles and ten boxes of cartridges. If British Government has, in fact, in their possession such a telegram, and it has not been distorted by evil-minded informers, they can convince themselves that it is not question of assistance rendered by Raskolnikof, but by some other person having no connection with Russian Government, whose name generally accepted rules of international courtesy do not permit Soviet Government to disclose. This example throws bright light on remaining information of similar description.

"7. Turning to even more petty facts mentioned in memorandum, Soviet Government does not consider it necessary to deny that it has in fact sent money to its representative in Persia, and has done this quite openly through London banks. Suspiciousness of British Government must be excessive for them to consider that Soviet representative in Orient has no other use for money than for purposes of anti-British intrigue. British Government know better than anyone else, if they are correctly informed, that Soviet Government seeks an establishment of friendly relations with peoples of the East not by intrigues and gold, but by measures of real unselfishness and friendly feelings to them.

"8. It is unlikely that any useful purpose will be served by further discussion of accusations brought forward in memorandum in field of so-called propaganda in the East. Actually, these accusations, apart from their unfoundedness, issue obviously from incorrect understanding of obligations undertaken by Soviet Government in regard to the East. These accusations give foundation to think that, in opinion of British Government, Russian Republic should have no policy of its own at all in the East, but should everywhere support English aspirations. Russian Government has taken no such obligation on itself, and no agreement to this effect between it and Great Britain has so far existed. Maintenance and development of friendly connections with peoples of the East, based on genuine respect of their interests and rights, cannot be accepted by Soviet Government

as a breach of Anglo-Russian Agreement. If British Government consider such policy unavoidably anti-British, then misunderstandings arising from this source are entirely comprehensible. Unfortunately, British Government have always refused to specify their demands to Soviet republics in field of Eastern policy, and have left unanswered offer made by Russian Government in its note of 27th September, 1921, for friendly discussion of ways and means which might lead to removal of such misunderstandings. And even when what would appear to have been a suitable opportunity for such discussion occurred on the occasion of only meeting between chiefs of Foreign Offices of both countries at Lausanne, Marquess Curzon confined himself to repetition of general reproaches, declining explanations or discussion.

"9. British Government found it necessary to refer in memorandum to activities of Third International in spite of frequent declarations of Soviet Government that in no case can it be identified with Third International. It does not propose to return again to this question, just as it does not on its part discuss declarations and actions of those political parties and other organisations to which members of British Government belong. As regards reference in memorandum to participation of People's Commissary for Finance, M. Sokolnikof, in some financial committee of Third International which is supposed to have assigned funds to Communist parties, Soviet Government declares that this communication is absolutely untrue from beginning to end, and that British Government in present case also has been led into error by evil informers.

"10 While dealing with question of so-called propaganda, Russian Government cannot but note with satisfaction that British Government on this occasion have brought forward no concrete accusations of propaganda in Great Britain itself in spite of fact that a certain section of English press during recent months has attacked with special fury Soviet Government for propaganda which it is supposed to carry on in Great Britain through its trade delegation and its representatives.

"11. Government of Great Britain has thought fit to support necessity of sending to Soviet Russia an ultimatum with threat of breaking off relations by referring to cases of infringement of interests of British citizens by Russian Government. Soviet Government cannot but note that beyond cases of trawlers, to which reference will be made further on, British Government has not put forward a single fact relating to infringement of interests of British subjects during the whole time that Anglo-Russian Agreement has been in force. Case which is alluded to in memorandum of shooting of Engineer Davison in connection with activity in Russia of secret service organisation of well-known Paul Dukes, took place in January 1920, *i.e.*, sixteen months before agreement was made and before cessation of period of English intervention and blockade. To the same period also belongs detention of Mrs. Stan Harding, who was accused of espionage on, amongst others, information of American journalist Miss Harrison. It would be useless to repeat once more explanations which were given by Russian Government in their lengthy correspondence on these incidents. It must, however, be remembered that during period alluded to, an immeasurably greater number of Russian citizens suffered both physically and materially from actions of

English authorities in north and south Soviet republics and in sphere of English influence. Shooting of twenty-six Baku commissaries which is mentioned in this correspondence is but one of many cases of similar nature. If point of view of compensation be adopted, then fairness demands its application to all cases of that period, amongst them to family of Kolomietsef, to Babushkin, Karakhanian and other citizens who were confined for several years without any accusation in English and Indian prisons. Cases of identical character cannot be judged with two different standards. Russian Government announces its readiness to compensate families of Davison and Mrs. Stan Harding, if British Government announces a similar readiness concerning above-mentioned Russian citizens.

" 12. Question of territorial waters is fully dealt with in note of Russian Government of 7th May, in which attention is drawn to absence of universal binding international rules, difference in practice of different countries in this connection, completely unfounded nature of demands for acceptance by Russia of same rule which is laid down by Great Britain, although not for whole extent of empire. Russian Government repeats declaration on subject of its readiness to take part in any international conference on this subject and to accept its findings. In note alluded to, it was already communicated that case of captured 'James Johnson' had been handed over for revision to Supreme Court, which had already quashed decision of Murmansk Court releasing skipper from arrest and ship from confiscation. Trawler entered territorial waters, thus infringing laws of country, but none the less, to avoid straining of relations, Russian Government has taken necessary steps, with result that all British trawlers, amongst them 'Lord Astor,' which was recently captured within four miles belt, can now be considered free. It cannot, however, accept responsibility for trawlers which sank at sea as a result of hurricane with Russian guard on board. Russian Government is ready to hand over question of its responsibility for loss of trawlers as consequence of above-mentioned cause for decision of court of arbitration.

" 13. Although question of status of churches in Soviet republics does not come in slightest degree into region of mutual relations of these republics with Great Britain, none the less, in the interest of correctly informing public opinion, Russian Government considers it necessary in most categorical manner to deny baseless charge that it is persecuting any religion of any sort. Soviet justice falls only on such of clergy as utilise their position as servitors in one of the churches for political activity directed against internal or external safety of Soviet republics. Soviet Republic is ready to admit unusual tone of Weinstein's first note. There must, however, be borne in mind, excitement and indignation which were created in broad masses of working and peasant population of Russia by attempts at interference in this internal Russian affair by one of the neighbouring States which desired to utilise the trial of Roman Catholic clergy for aggressive political aims. British Mission must have known of this excitement. British agent, Mr. Hodgson, tried privately to get into touch with M. Litvinof's assistant People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs regarding trial and received from him categorical reply that he was unable either officially or

unofficially to enter into correspondence on this question with him. After this Mr. Hodgson could not but foresee possible attitude which Soviet Government would adopt towards any official action from his side, and it is to be regretted that he did not take this fact into consideration, but thought it possible to present his note, which was interpreted by Commissary for Foreign Affairs as a definite challenge. In referring in his reply to representative of Irish Republic, Weinstein wished to make it clear how inconvenient for either side was interference with internal affairs of the other and that interference in the case of Czepliak was appraised in Russia, as would have been interference of Russia in Irish affairs by Great Britain. At the same time one must have in view that, except for above-mentioned neighbour of Russia and of Great Britain, no other Government approached Soviet Government officially on this matter. In light of these circumstances, unusual tone of Weinstein's reply should be intelligible. In any case, this note was returned by Mr. Hodgson, was not presented second time to British Government, and can therefore be considered as non-existing, in the same way as Weinstein's second letter arising from it, which, moreover, contained nothing offensive.

"14. Russian Soviet Government considers one of the chief causes of the perpetual misunderstandings between it and British Government is the fact that in connection with position which has arisen after Peace of Versailles certain circles of *Entente* refuse to have dealings with other countries on a basis of real equality of parties. Without denying that very considerable number of countries have in fact during recent years come into a position dependent or semi-dependent on countries of former *Entente*, Russian Government considers it necessary to state that position of Soviet republics has, can have, and will have nothing in common with a condition dependent on the will of a foreign Government. If ruling classes of Great Britain had grasped this fact, chief hindrance to normal and peaceful relations, equally advantageous to both sides, would have been removed.

"15. In spite of reiterated misunderstandings, Soviet republics highly value present relations with Great Britain, and endeavour to preserve and develop them to the interests of general peaceable economic restoration of ruined European peoples of Soviet union as of England, and they are therefore ready for most favourable and peaceful settlement of existing conflicts.

"16. Action of British Government has been called forth apparently by a completely false valuation of situation of Soviet republics clearly under influence of White emigrants, who never distorted realities more than now. Taking especially into consideration present international situation, events in Central Europe, news from countries bordering Soviet republics regarding growing military activity, journeyings through these countries of Allied generals, particularly of recent inspection by English Military Mission of Roumanian frontier, Russian Government recognises that rupture of relations would be pregnant with new dangers and complications menacing to peace, and that British Government, in the event of rupture, would assume immense responsibility in the face of history. Russian Government declare that there is

