

J.I.149

*Le Professeur W.Rappard au Colonel House**Copie**L*

Valavran near Geneva, January 31st 1918

My dear Colonel House,

When I last had the privilege of seeing you at the Crillon in Paris, you requested me to write you privately every time something of real significance in Swiss or international politics came to my notice. I therefore take the liberty of writing the following letter. Knowing how intensely busy you are, I shall endeavor to make it as pregnant and as concise as possible.

1. Concerning the relations between the United States and Switzerland, everything has developed according to our previsions. The trade agreement¹ was hailed by public opinion as a proof of the generosity and of the fair and democratic intentions of your government towards our country. The principal German-Swiss papers were no less enthusiastic in the expression of their gratification than were those of French Switzerland. From Zurich, Bern, and Basle, as well as from Geneva and Lausanne, articles appeared and were widely commented on, in which the liberal attitude of the U.S. towards us was attributed to the community of democratic and federalist ideals and institutions. The best proof of the influence this unconscious propaganda exerted without, as well as within our borders, was the

1. Cf. n^o 366, *Annexe*.



outburst of wild indignation and scorn it provoked on the part of the papers, such as the *Berner Tageblatt*, the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, and the *Indépendance Helvétique*, which are, as everyone here knows, the mouthpieces of the imperial German diplomatic service in Switzerland.

Ever since the publication of the main features of the agreement, that part of our press which receives its inspirations directly from Berlin has claimed that the U.S. government had neither the possibility nor the intention of keeping its word. It has jubilantly and exultantly greeted the news of delayed shipments, sulkily and skeptically admitted the confident declarations of our government. The French Swiss press has naturally always been absolutely hopeful and friendly, the great mass of the German Swiss newspapers likewise, although more cautiously so.

Your government cannot be too insistently assured that the regular shipment of the few shiploads a month of grain which our country imperatively needs is the most efficient, as well as the most economical means of propaganda it can use abroad. To feed Switzerland, thus preventing her from falling into absolute economic dependence on the Central Powers, and discreetly to point to the reasons of democratic sympathy which prompt you to do so, is to convince not only Swiss, but German public opinion as well, of the sincerity and earnestness of your just and pacific purpose towards the New Europe. Our stocks of food-stuffs are almost exhausted. Our daily rations are far below those of the belligerent countries. Public opinion is therefore peculiarly sensitive on this score. No effort you can make in this direction will be lost and the effort necessary to feed a people of 3 800 000 inhabitants will always be comparatively slight.

The three points concerning Switzerland, which ought never to be lost sight of in the United States, when the problem of revictualling the European neutrals is considered, are:

- a. The dependance of Switzerland on her grain imports. (Only 1/5th of the necessary supply can be produced on her Alpine soil.)
- b. The politico-ethnical composition of the Swiss people, which makes of our Confederation a true microcosm of the League of Nations.
- c. The existence of a large and influential Swiss press of German tongue, which daily reaches tens of thousands of the most thoughtful of Germans and Austrians.

2. Recent conversations with and reports from influential and well-informed Swiss, Dutch, French, British, Austrian, and German citizens enable me to make the following statements concerning the international situation:

- a. The Brest-Litovsk negotiations and the prospects of the Spring offensive divide public opinion in Germany more profoundly than it has ever been divided since the beginning of the war. On the one hand the military party in the German Empire has grown in ambition and influence, if not in numbers, as a result of the Russian anarchy. On the other hand the more liberal elements in Germany and practically the whole Austro-Hungarian people are more bitter and more resolute in their opposition to the militarists and more inclined to listen to reasonable peace terms than ever. President Wilson's recent utterances have taken a much greater hold of public opinion in Central Europe than any of his former ones. Neutral opinion is more strongly with him than it has ever been with any of the other belligerent statesmen since the war began.

b. If such a suggestion be not deemed too impertinent, I would say that in order to hold liberal opinion firmly everywhere in Europe and thereby to coërcé the German government – still hesitant between the menace of serious uprisings and the threat of resignation of the greatest German generals, – President Wilson should insistently and specifically repudiate, in the name of all the Allies, all imperialistic aims on their part. His attacks should be directed more and more concretely against the German military party and the German war trade interests (Schwerindustrie), less against militarism and autocracy in the abstract. The Hohenzollerns are not unpopular in Germany unfortunately, and the democratic reform of the government will be retarded, more than hastened, by too specific pressure from without. But the Tirpitz and the Krupps, the alliance of military feudalism and monopolistic capitalism, are ever more being singled out as the true criminals by public opinion in Germany. The problem is how to precipitate a natural evolution, without by so doing, creating retarding counter-currents, how to appeal to liberalism, love of peace, and disgust with militarism in Germany, without too brutally offending German national pride. The President's recent utterances seem to have had a very felicitous effect in this respect.

3. Germany has indirectly, but very clearly, let the neutral world know of late that her chemical laboratories and industries are supplying her artillery with new and very murderous shells. Reports from independent and serious chemists of pro-Ally sympathies convince me that this is no mere piece of bluff. As Germany knows that these new gas shells, against which there is said to be no effective mask protection, can easily be imitated by its enemies, the announcement of their preparation is apparently to be interpreted as an indirect peace move. I should not have mentioned this matter was I not informed about it on the best of authorities.

These few notes are a digest of the most significant information I have gathered since my return. You will readily understand that I must request you to consider them as absolutely confidential as to their source. Should such or like information be of real interest to you, I shall always be glad to supply you with it. I should greatly appreciate a word of reply on this point².

Thanking you again most cordially for all the kindness and confidence you were good enough to show me in New York and in Paris and especially for the keen and warm interest you take in my country, I beg you to believe me...

2. *Le 12 mars 1918 House répond à Rappard*: Please accept my thanks and assurances of appreciation for your letter of January 31st which is full of information and interesting suggestions. I shall take occasion upon my next visit to Washington to give the President the pleasure of reading it. Other than that, I shall treat it in confidence. I hope you will write me from time to time and give me the benefit of your advice and views which, be assured, I greatly value.