

*Mr. Vereker to Viscount Halifax*

*Helsingfors, October 9, 1940.*

(No. 834.)

(Telegraphic.)

YOUR telegram No. 536.

1. I have no desire to minimise the seriousness of the Finnish action, but feel that extenuating circumstances can be invoked.

2. Finns, to my mind, are far from ungrateful to us for our assistance, but evacuation of Northern Norway has been regarded as an indication that we were abandoning northern countries to their fate. Finns may be pardoned for suspicion that we would prefer to see absorbed by Russia to seeing her help German war effort in the slightest degree, whereas Finland at the same time cannot be gainsaid the right to seek means of keeping herself alive and free.

3. Public opinion, as far as I can gather in absence of all press comment, is bitterly and solidly opposed to the passage of German troops which it regards as an insult to the country's sovereign rights. Government and General Staff may hope that this development creates a new German interest in Finland which might help keep Russians out of the country, but if would be unfair to forget that our nickel policy may have contributed to drive Finland into the arms Germany, and that drowning men are apt to clutch at straws. Once we force Finns into making a pact with the devil it would be invidious to complain that they are coming off second best, seeing that the devil is not easy person to deal with.

4. I submit that our aim should be to retrieve the position in so far as may prove possible, and not to aggravate it by closing Petsamo route, although threats to its continuance, combined with circumstance that Finnish Government have patently placed themselves in the wrong by their unneutral act, should contribute to conclusion of as satisfactory an agreement as can be hoped for.

5. As regards attitude of Finnish press and General Staff, I defy any country in Finland's position not to make some attempt to trim its sail according to the wind, but Finnish Government, to my knowledge, have not deliberately taken any step calculated to prejudice our interests in order to curry favour with Germans. Neither do I consider that there is any justification for the accusation of Germanophilism against Finnish Government. They are just as anxious as ever that we should win the war, as long as our victory does not involve loss of Finnish independence, and you may rest assured that they will only submit to German demands under extreme pressure.

6. I do not believe there is any intrinsic difference in the attitude of Finnish General Staff, though in their case urge to appear pro-German to Germans may be more pronounced. My military attaché agrees, as also with view that it would never occur to Finnish General Staff to import war material for the German's benefit.

(Repeated to Stockholm, No. 33, Saving.)

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*Source:* British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and papers from the Foreign Office confidential print. Part III. Series A (The Soviet Union and Finland.). Volume 2, document nr. 91. University Publications of America, 1997.