

JUNE 3, 1915

country's welfare, redoun[d] to your own personal credit and to the advantage of our party.

With assurances of high respect, I am, my dear Mr. President,
Very sincerely yours, W. J. Bryan

TLS (WP, DLC).

From William Jennings Bryan, with Enclosure

Washington

My Dear Mr. President:

Afternoon June 3, 1915.

I am sending you the memorandum prepared by Mr. Lansing. I have not, of course, had an opportunity to examine the authorities upon which he bases his opinion, but the arguments which he presents seem, for the most part, reasonable.

The objection based upon the fact that the *LUSITANIA* was built by the aid of the Government and is subject to being called into the Government use is, it seems to me, quite effectively answered. I am not sure, however, that I would go as far as he does when he says that if the vessel were entirely owned by the British Government and yet put in trade as a merchant vessel, it would occupy exactly the same character as a privately owned merchant vessel.

As to the second argument, namely, that the *LUSITANIA* had guns on board: It seems to me that that fact would be material if she had any guns other than those made known to us. We have regulations in regard to the size of the guns that can be taken on a merchant vessel. If it could be shown that the *LUSITANIA* had *concealed* guns which were not made known to our authorities, and that the fact was made to the German Government, it seems to me that it might properly have some bearing, unless we take the position that it is the *unresisting* ship and not the *unarmed* ship that is entitled to protection. I think that it might be well for us to state the facts as we understand them and express a willingness to hear any arguments that contradicts this position.

While, as you know, I have felt that we ought to do something to protect our flag from use by belligerents, I do not see that the question of using neutral flags can be raised in this case, because there is no doubt that the *LUSITANIA* was flying a belligerent flag. What Mr. Lansing says about the impossibility of ram[m]ing a submarine with a ship the size of the *LUSITANIA* would seem to be quite conclusive, although, if it is true that secret instructions have been issued instructing merchant vessels to adopt, in regard to submarines, a course different from that occupied by mer-

chant vessels in resisting the attack of armed cruisers, that fact ought to be taken into consideration. In other words, if a submarine is to be bound by the rules applicable to merchantment, then the merchantmen ought also be bound by the rules applicable when the merchantmen are attacked by a cruiser.

It seems to me that the question of ammunition is the most serious one raised and I do not share Mr. Lansing's view that we can ignore entirely the question raised as to whether our law was violated. Even if we say that the enforcement of our laws must be entrusted to our own officials and not to commanders of submarines of belligerents, still we must consider the moral effect of a position which would make us seem to acquiesce in the carrying of American citizens with ammunition in violation of law. I feel that our position would be very much strengthened by affirmative action which would for the future prevent the carrying of ammunition by passenger ships, and, as I said in my note of this morning, which accompanies this, I believe it would have a very beneficial influence, both on public opinion in this country and on the German Government, if we took action at once in regard to the carrying of ammunition.

With assurances of high respect, I am, my dear Mr. President,
Very sincerely yours, W. J. Bryan

TLS (WP, DLC).

E N C L O S U R E

Robert Lansing to William Jennings Bryan

Dear Mr. Secretary: [Washington] June 3, 1915.

I am submitting a memorandum on the allegations of facts contained in the German note of May 28th.¹ If I had more time, it could be very much abbreviated.

It seems to me that only two of the allegations are relevant to the German defense, namely:

- (1) That the LUSITANIA was armed, and
- (2) That the commander of the submarine feared the LUSITANIA would ram him.

There is no evidence that the German Government had information that the vessel was armed or information sufficient to found a belief to that effect.

As to the second allegation, the danger of the LUSITANIA, a vessel of over 31000 tons burden, being able to maneuver so as to ram a small swift moving craft like a submarine is too remote

home, but what might be the effect abroad. I told him in my opinion, it would have the opposite of what he was thinking for it would show the world that he meant what he said in his first note & everyone would soon realize that the entire country was backing him up. . . .

I wish you were here,

Your own Edward

ALS (RSB Coll., DLC).

To William Jennings Bryan

My dear Mr. Secretary:

The White House June 9, 1915

It was very thoughtful of you to send me your note of yesterday afternoon about the release of the letters and I was glad to take advantage of it to avoid misunderstandings.

The note is now finished and will go forward probably this afternoon, as soon as it can be put into cipher. I need not tell you again how sincerely I deplore what is to accompany its dispatch.

I am sending to Mr. Lansing today, according to what I understand is the custom of the department, a letter designating him Secretary of State *ad interim*, so that he may sign the instructions to Gerard.

With warmest regard,

Cordially and faithfully yours, Woodrow Wilson

TLS (W. J. Bryan Papers, DLC).

From William Jennings Bryan

My Dear Mr President:

Washington June 9th, 1915

It is with sincere regret that I have reached the conclusion that I should return to you the commission of Secretary of State with which you honored me at the beginning of your administration.

Obedient to your sense of duty, and actuated by the highest motives, you have prepared for transmission to the German Government a note in which I can not join without violating what I deem to be an obligation to my country, and the issue involved is of such moment that to remain a member of the cabinet would be as unfair to you as it would be to the cause which is nearest my heart, namely, the prevention of war.

I, therefore, respectfully tender my resignation, to take effect when the note is sent unless you prefer an earlier hour. Alike desirous of reaching a peaceful solution of the problems arising

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out of the use of submarines against merchantmen we find ourselves differing irreconcilably as to the methods which should be employed.

It falls to your lot to speak officially for the nation: I consider it to be none the less my duty to endeavor as a private citizen to promote the end which you have in view by means which you do not feel at liberty to use.

In severing the intimate and pleasant relations which have existed between us during the past two years permit me to acknowledge the profound satisfaction which it has given me to be associated with you in the important work which has come before the State Department, and to thank you for the courtesies extended. With the heartiest good wishes for your personal welfare and for the success of your administration I am my dear Mr President,

Very truly yours W. J. Bryan

ALS (WP, DLC).

To William Jennings Bryan

My dear Mr. Bryan:

The White House June 9, 1915.

I accept your resignation only because you insist upon its acceptance; and I accept it with much more than deep regret, with a feeling of personal sorrow. Our two years of close association have been very delightful to me. Our judgments have accorded in practically every matter of official duty and of public policy until now; your support of the work and purposes of the administration has been generous and loyal beyond praise; your devotion to the duties of your great office and your eagerness to take advantage of every great opportunity for service it offered have been an example to the rest of us; you have earned our affectionate admiration and friendship. Even now we are not separated in the object we seek but only in the method by which we seek it.

It is for these reasons that my feeling about your retirement from the Secretaryship of State goes so much deeper than regret. I sincerely deplore it. Our objects are the same and we ought to pursue them together. I yield to your desire only because I must and wish to bid you Godspeed in the parting. We shall continue to work for the same causes even when we do not work in the same way.

With affectionate regard,

Sincerely yours, Woodrow Wilson¹

TLS (CLO).

¹ There is a WWsh draft of this letter, dated June 8, 1915, in WP, DLC.