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Sir C. Dormer
Oslo

No. 157

King
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Dominions

See W4578/2854/42

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

Sir,

The Norwegian Minister asked to see me to-day on his return from his short visit to Oslo. He told me that while there had not been many people in Oslo he had seen the Prime Minister and M. Koht besides other officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. As a result of these conversations ~~matured~~, although he had little to add on the subject of the various questions pending between our two Governments, he felt that he had a considerably better understanding of Norwegian opinion. M. Koht had not yet made up his mind as to whether or not to reply to His Majesty's Government's note of March 15th on the Altmark case, but the Minister thought that he would probably send an answer. He had the feeling that M. Koht was equally hesitant on the majority of questions now at issue in Norwegian politics such as Finland, and he had on the latter subject added nothing to his broadcast explanations of Norwegian policy. M. Colban said that he had had similar lengthy discussions with the Prime Minister and these also had not led to any very definite results although M. Koht ~~Minister~~ ~~Minister~~ had been good enough to express satisfaction with his work in London.

2. Monsieur Colban then turned to more practical matters, and referred to the two notes which he had left with Mr. Collier on the previous day (N 3532 & N 3572 copies ~~see my despatch No.~~ of which will be sent to you in due course), complaining of small infringements of/

Saying he was not ~~[illegible]~~ returning to Oslo on the instructions of his Government.

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of Norwegian territory by aircraft and warships. He realised that these were due to inadvertence but he begged me to impress on the authorities responsible the need for greater care by the individuals concerned. He had just been informed that morning of the torpedoing of a large Norwegian ship the "Cometa" and it was unfortunate that the Germans should have any handle with which to reply to Norwegian protests in such cases. British infringements were small in themselves, but they looked bad in the mass.

3. In reply I told the Minister that I had only just returned to London and had not seen the two notes to which he referred. While I was sure that it must have been valuable for him to have had an opportunity of learning his Government's point of view at first hand, I much hoped that he had been able to interpret our own feelings in London. I would enquire into the alleged violations of Norwegian territorial waters by British war ships, although I was surprised to hear of them. I would not disguise from him that, while I appreciated the Norwegian point of view, certain facts must be recognised. On the one side there were violations of Norwegian neutrality involving repeated losses of Norwegian life and property, and these violations were undeniably part of a deliberate and shameless policy. On the other side, if there were any infringements which I would not necessarily admit, they entailed no loss of life, and yet all the time the Royal Navy/

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Navy were obliged to watch vital supplies for Germany passing up and down the protected corridor inside Norwegian waters. I hoped therefore that the Minister would ~~try~~ be fair to appreciate our point of view in this matter. The Minister said that he would try to do so, but some of the British infractions had been worse than others and indeed in one instance a warning shot from a British destroyer had actually landed on Norwegian soil. Moreover in another note which he had addressed to the Foreign Office that day, complaint was made of no less than fourteen separate violations of Norwegian territory by aircraft which seemed almost too great a number to be entirely accidental. 84. Mr. Colban then turned to the question of exports of iron ore from Narvik regarding which he said that he had spoken to Mr. Collier the day before. Exports to Germany had fallen off while those to Great Britain had been maintained, and moreover the war trade agreements with both Sweden and Norway were designed to regulate this question. In these circumstances he could not understand why the London press continued to urge the vital importance of these iron ore supplies to Germany and he did not believe that they were in fact vital at all. 46 In conclusion we had some conversation with regard to the threats of a Russian drive to secure a sea port on the Atlantic. The Minister refused to take these threats very seriously, since he said that he could not believe that the Soviets would thus willingly involve themselves in war to the

death/

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death with the British Empire. At the same time he admitted that the Russian demands for transit facilities across Finland caused him some anxiety. I told him that M. Maisky had that day assured me that his Government had no such intentions as those we were discussing.

56. Our conversation was very friendly and M. Colban as usual gave the impression that he personally fully understood our position. On one point in particular he said that he had spoken his own mind to his Government, namely the question of armaments. I would realise, he said, what it meant for a former Director of the Disarmament Section of the League of Nations Secretariat to reach the conclusion that his country must at all costs rearm.

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