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W.P. (40) 3.

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WAR CABINET.

SWEDISH IRON ORE.

*Comments by First Lord of the Admiralty on Chiefs of Staff Report.*

WITH many of the larger arguments of the Chiefs of Staff's report (W.P. (39) 179) I am in full accord. But I fear that its effect will lead to a purely negative conclusion, and that nothing will be done.

2. The self-contained minor operation of stopping the ore from Narvik and at Oxelosund must not be tried because it would jeopardise the larger plan. The larger plan must not be attempted unless Sweden and Norway co-operate. Not merely must they not resist militarily, or adopt a purely passive attitude, but they must actively co-operate (paragraphs 15 and 16).

3. But is there any prospect of Sweden and Norway actively co-operating with us of their own free will to bring about a series of operations which, as is well set out in the paper, will—

- (a) Ruin the trade of their ironfield and the shipping which carries it.
- (b) Involve them in war with Germany.
- (c) Expose the whole southern part of both countries to German invasion and occupation.

Left to themselves they will certainly refuse, and, if pressed diplomatically, they will protest loudly to the world. Thus the minor operation is knocked out for the sake of the bigger, and the bigger is only declared practicable upon conditions which will not occur.

4. The only way in which the desired train of events can, perhaps, be set in motion is by the practical step of stopping the Narvik ore. This causes little injury to Norway and Sweden and is the minimum violation of their neutrality. It is not comparable to an act of invasion of their soil. Nevertheless, as this paper shows, it may bring about a violent German reaction. If this reaction takes the form of the invasion of southern Norway and southern Sweden, then alone will the offence be given to those countries, which will make them take up arms in self-defence, and this will be the moment when they will look to us for aid and be willing to open to us the passage to the northern orefields. Thus the minor operation, far from jeopardising the major, is, in fact, the only way by which the major is likely to become possible. In short, the object of the minor operation is to provoke a German reaction which will secure us the Norwegian and Swedish co-operation deemed essential.

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5. The only sequence of events which seems to offer any prospect of successful action is the following :—

(z).—Offer general assurances of support to Norway and Sweden against both Germany and Russia.

(z-3).—Inform them of our intention to interrupt the Narvik ore.

(z-4).—Let the flotillas act on the Norwegian coast.

(Any time before z-30).—Take all possible measures at Oxelosund.

Meanwhile, at once make preparation secretly for the winter force to occupy the ironfield. Await German reaction on the south coasts of Norway and Sweden. Should this take the form of invasion and the Swedes and Norwegians be forced on to our side, then offer the fullest support in our power.

W. S. C.

*December 31, 1939.*

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