

**THE DEBATE ON  
THE FOREIGN POLICY  
OF SWEDEN**

**1918-1939**

**BY**

**HERBERT TINGSTEN**

**TRANSLATED BY JOAN BULMAN**

*Oxford University Press*

Against the background of a brief account of Swedish foreign policy the author sets a detailed study of the debate on this policy and on international problems in general, which took place in Swedish public life and the Press between the two world wars. The main problems concern Sweden's relations with the League of Nations, the attempts to establish political and military cooperation between the Scandinavian countries, and two particular Swedish actions during the period: the attempt through the agency of the League to secure the return of the Aaland Islands to Sweden in 1918—21, and the proposal for the joint Swedish-Finnish defence of Aaland in 1938—9. The book is unique in its field in being based on an exhaustive first-hand acquaintance with Riksdag reports and all books, newspapers and periodicals, of the period. The praise which the Swedish edition received from newspapers of varied political views in Scandinavia indicates its quality and its impartiality.

The author is Editor of the well-known newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* of Stockholm.

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GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

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## PREFACE

The object of the present work is to provide an account of the debate on central questions of foreign policy in Sweden during the period between the two World Wars. Some questions of a more special or technical character, e.g. trade policy and international law, have been omitted; so have, as a rule, the less representative contributions which obviously had no effect in shaping public opinion. I have endeavoured as far as possible to trace not only the main outline of the debate but also its influence on public opinion. But here such conclusions as it was possible to draw were necessarily qualified and uncertain.

My purpose has been to define the different views held on Swedish foreign policy, not to give an account of that foreign policy itself, which I have only done to the extent necessary to explain the argument. It is preferable, therefore, that the reader should if possible have some preliminary knowledge of Swedish foreign policy during the inter-war period and of the organisation and activities of the League of Nations. An outline of Swedish foreign policy is to be found in various books, including Rütger Essén, *Sverige upplever världen*, 1935, Paul Mohn, *Sverige i utrikespolitiskt perspektiv*, 1937, and Åke Thulstrup, *Reformer och försvar*, 1938. The most important work on Sweden's policy in the League of Nations is S. S. Jones, *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations*, 1939. Among the many valuable general accounts of international relations during the period may be mentioned E. H. Carr, *International Relations since the Peace Treaties*, 1937, and G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs*, 1938. I should like to recommend also E. H. Carr's analytical work *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1939 (published in Sweden in 1941 under the title *Den förlorade freden*) which would appear indispensable for a proper understanding of modern international policy.

The discussion on foreign policy in Sweden during this period was only conducted to a very limited extent in the Riksdag. By far the most important source is the Press. It is extremely difficult to give an all-round picture of the attitude of the Press, and I have

## PREFACE

certainly not always been successful. I have been through a number of leading journals and newspapers—about twenty-five, fifteen of them newspapers—covering the whole period. In connection with all the more important questions, I have also studied the Press cuttings of the Swedish Foreign Office, filling between 600 and 700 volumes, which were kindly placed at my disposal. I have also studied other supplementary Press sources in connection with various longer or shorter periods. On all the more important questions, therefore, the account should be fairly complete. In the preliminary study of the Riksdag publications and the Press I had the help of a number of assistants.

In a work like the present, it is practically impossible to give complete references. When, for example, I state that the Conservatives took up a certain attitude, I could not possibly quote several dozen Conservative newspapers in support. The only possibility was to give examples rather than a complete documentation. In each case I have quoted a few typical contributions. I am fully aware that this method encourages distortion; it is easy to say that a few comments are typical when they are not. The reader can only accept my assurance that every care has been taken to prevent such errors of judgment.

Neither was it possible, in a case such as that just mentioned, to give a quantitative estimate of opinion. I have not said, for example, that 32 Conservative newspapers took one line and 19 another. For one thing, such an estimate would have to be absolutely complete, which would necessitate a disproportionate amount of labour. For another, the result would be uncertain and misleading: the shades of transition from one view to another are difficult to determine, some newspapers are far more important than others, one may conduct a vigorous campaign on a certain question while another will refer to it only in a few minor leading articles. In practice, the figures arrived at would not have the same definite statistical value as an election or vote.

An analysis of the Swedish Press discussion cannot really be complete without particulars as to the attitude of the Swedish Press on various questions, the editors of the various organs, their party affiliation and circulation. But it was out of the question to provide this information here. I refer the reader to various works on the subject, in particular Gunnar Bjurman, *Tredje statsmakten*, 1935, Ragnar Ekman, *Den svenska dagspressen*, 1938, and Edvard Thermanius, *Sveriges politiska partier*, 1933. Valuable information, though often coloured by the political views of the authors, is to be found in two German works: Rud. Fleck, *Die schwedische Provinzpresse der Gegenwart*, 1939, and Gerh. Kuhlmann, *Die Stockholmer Tagespresse*, 1938. In defining the party sympathies of the various newspapers, I was assisted by the party organisations.

To describe the debate in one country, one should really be able

## PREFACE

to make comparisons with other countries. This was hardly possible in the present case. So far as I am aware, no investigation at all comparable with that attempted here has ever been made in any other country. But a number of studies of the Press and of the formation of public opinion have been published, dealing particularly with somewhat earlier periods; cf. the bibliographies in S. B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, 1941, and O. J. Hale, *Germany and the Diplomatic Revolution*, 1931. Many of these works are not to be found in Swedish libraries and I have therefore not been able to consult them.

A more comprehensive documentation is to be found in the Swedish edition of this work; here this has been considerably reduced.

In the references I have used a number of abbreviations which ought not to cause any difficulty. When a certain issue of a newspaper is mentioned, the reference is to the leading article or one of the leading articles.

I have frequently been indebted for general information, or more specific information on a number of points, to conversations I have had with a large number of persons, in particular politicians and journalists. I should like now—without mentioning any names—to thank them for the help they have given me. I have also been allowed access to certain unpublished notes by an outstanding politician covering the years 1918—1921; these have thrown valuable light particularly on certain aspects of the Aaland question. As regards Swedish foreign policy, I have not attempted to obtain information other than that available to the general public; an account of a discussion on foreign policy should be given in the light of the facts as known to those taking part in the discussion.

I hope in a later volume to be able to give an account of the discussion on Swedish foreign policy during the Second World War. In view of this fact, I have not dealt fully with certain problems in the present volume; this applies in particular to the question of the part played by the Press in Sweden's relations with other countries.

Finally I should like to thank the librarians at the Royal Library and the Riksdag library, Stockholm for their invariable kindness and helpfulness.

I should also like to express my gratitude to Knut och Alice Wallenbergs Stiftelse for paying the cost of the translation of this book into English and of its publication in this language.

Stockholm, August, 1949.

*Herbert Tingsten.*



## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
PREFACE . . . . .	5
<b>AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR</b>	
SWEDEN, THE WAR AND THE PEACE . . . . .	11
SWEDEN, THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE RELAXATION OF INTERNATIONAL TENSION . . . . .	14
THE AALAND QUESTION (1917—1921) . . . . .	83
SWEDEN AND SCANDINAVIA . . . . .	137
THE DEFENCE QUESTION IN TERMS OF DISARMAMENT . . . . .	155
<b>BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR</b>	
SWEDEN, THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE WORLD CRISIS	173
SCANDINAVIAN CO-OPERATION . . . . .	222
THE QUESTION OF REVISION OF THE AALAND CONVENTION (1933—1939) . . . . .	242
THE DEFENCE QUESTION IN TERMS OF REARMAMENT . . . . .	277
<b>VIEWS AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	
THE SWEDISH FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEBATE . . . . .	283
SWEDEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOREIGN POLICY . . . . .	295
NOTES . . . . .	307

## INDEX

- Aaland Islands 7, 26, 27, 33, 35, 39; Aaland question and League of Nations 83—137; fortification of 83, 84; relations with Finland 84—99, 101, 113—14, 259, 265; desire for reunion with Sweden 84—5, 87—90, 93, 95; offered to Sweden by Germany 85; debate in Riksdag on 90; effect of Finnish Civil War 93; behaviour of Russian troops in 93; agreement between Sweden, Finland, Germany about demolition of fortifications 94; rediscussion of question 1939 Parliament 215; defence of 241; Swedish campaign for incorporating Islands 97, 124; League Commissioners' report 102—3; Swedish Govt. memorandum 104—6; League decision 106; Convention on international and military position 107; main arguments in favour of Swedish occupation 96; plebiscite on reunion with Sweden 99; delegation to Sweden received by King 100; international legal commission appointed 102; Finnish opinion 96; informal conversations between Sweden and Finland 93—137; Swedish appeal to Peace Conference 98; people's petition to Landsting for national determination 98; Finland's reply to Swedish communication of 1918 98; Swedish reply to above note 99; second appeal to Sweden (1920) 121; arrest of Aaland leaders 121; submission of question of Aaland Islands to L. of Nations 121—3; comments on Swedish attitude to Aaland Islands question 132; revision of Convention 242—277; fortification of southern islands 254; Landsting rejects Finnish conscription bill 268; summary of official Swedish attitude to revision of Aaland Islands plan 275—7; attitude of Social Democratic Press 289
- Activism 83—4, 86, 90; criticized by Branting 92
  - Activists 83, 88, 95, 127, 137
  - Committee (March 1939) 253
  - — Publications 253
  - Convention 83, 195, 214, 222; revision of 242—77
  - Island Bill 254
- Abyssinia 179, 181—3, 193, 305
- Activism, *see* Aaland Activism
- Activists (Swedish political movement) 12
- Adelswärd Theodor (Liberal politician) 120—1
- Aftonbladet* (Liberal paper), Aaland question 119, 120, 124; Scandinavian co-operation 145; Aaland defence 244; Aaland fortifications 259
- Akerberg Harald (Social Democrat politician), attitude towards sanctions 191, 212; supports Govt. in revision of Aaland plan 262
- Akerman Lt. Gen., Aaland Commission 171
- Albania 194
- Alexanderson Nils (Liberal politician) 17
- America, United States of, *see* United States of America
- Anderson Ivar (Conservative journalist) 229, 264

## INDEX

- Andersson i Rasjön (Member of People's Party) 211, 217, 229, 264  
*Arbetarbladet* (Social Democratic paper) 258  
*Arbetaren* (Syndicalist paper) 183  
*Arbetet* (Social Democratic paper), article on League 65; Åaland question 92, 116, 117, 122, 126, 127; attack on proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 145, 206; sanctions 214; vacillating outlook re. defensive alliance 239; Swedish-Finnish co-operation re. Åaland plan 256; revision of Åaland plan 276  
 Arbitration, procedure 16; Geneva Protocol 42; Sweden and 50, 51; general rules for 51  
 Armaments, limitation of 25; national armaments 24  
 Armistice (1918), Swedish disappointment 13  
 Army reorganisation (Swedish) 1936 281  
 — Organisation Bill (Swedish) 66  
 Austria 194  
 Bagge Gösta (Conservative Party leader) 174, 184, 189, 190, 196, 201, 211, 216, 217, 229; Scandinavian co-operation 236, 237; supports Govt. re. revision of Åaland plan 262, 264, 269; speech re. universality of League 305  
 Baldwin Government (Great Britain) 180  
 Baltic agreement (1908) 83  
 — Commission to Peace Conference 99  
 — States, Finnish orientation towards 136, 141  
 Bergelin Colonel 232  
 Belgium, Oslo Trade Convention concluded with 223  
 Belts the 141  
 Björk Captain N. 232, 246  
 Bjurman Gunnar (Secretary Newspaper Association), *Tredje statsmakten* 1935 6  
 Blockade of Germany in First World War 23  
 Boheman Eric (Swedish Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs) 249  
*Bohuslänningen* (People's Party organ) 259  
 Bothnia, Gulf of 273  
 Branting Georg (Social Democrat politician), article in *Arbetet* 117  
 Branting Hjalmar (Social Democrat Prime Minister, March 1920—Oct. 1920; 1921—1923; 1924—1925); First World War 12; L. of Nations 17, 25, 33; the idea of justice 35; disarmament 32; member of Swedish delegation to League 36; critical of draft treaty of mutual assistance 42; attitude to Geneva Protocol 43; attacks on by Conservative Press 58; Corfu Incident 59, 62, 64, 65; article in *Social-Demokraten* on Åaland question 91—2; statement to *Le Temps* on Åaland question 95; signed document on Swedish claim to Åaland Islands presented to L. of Nations 98; presents Swedish Govt. memorandum to L. of Nations Council on Åaland 104; Åaland Islands 117, 126, 130, 276;  
 Bratt Colonel K. A. 169, 232  
 Brest-Litovsk, Russian agreement re. demolition of fortification on Åaland Islands 94  
 British Imperialists, view by Syndicalists 240  
 Bulgaria, dispute with Greece 76  
 Carlsson Professor Gottfrid 110, 253  
 Carr E. H. *International Relations since the Peace Treaties* (1937) 5; *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939) 5; on international politics 306  
 Cassel Professor Gustaf, on French post-war policy 55  
 Cecil Lord Robert, attitude to Corfu incident 61  
 Chamberlain Neville (English Conservative politician) 48; Munich 194  
 Christmas-Müller (Danish Conservative Leader) 140, 225

## INDEX

- Clemenceau Georges (Chairman of the Peace Conference) 18, 100  
 collective security, League of Nations and 33, 35, 39, 40, 42—3  
 Comintern 176  
 commission of generals 163  
 — of jurists 123  
 Communist Party 29; motions urging secession from League 38; views on  
 Corfu incident 61—2; opposition to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence  
 alliance 145; Press 184; attitude to League 201, 230; re. Scandinavianism  
 240; Aaland defence 244; suspicion of German influence in Aaland plan  
 260, 262; Communist theory of Society liberated from power of state 306  
 conciliation treaties (between Scandinavian States) 141  
 Conference of World Federation of Trades Unions (1938) 208  
 Conscription law (for Aaland) 251  
 Conservative Party, support Govt. policy in revision of Aaland plan 262  
 Conservative Press, Aaland question 116—17, 124—6; League policy 214;  
 favourable attitude to foreign policy re. League 214  
 Conservatives II, attitude to League 19, 38, 86—7; minority report on League  
 of Nations 23; attitude to foreign affairs 30—1; attitude to Disarmament  
 Conference 54; attack on Geneva Protocol 44; adopt idea of intervention on  
 humanitarian grounds 94—5; attitude to Finnish Civil War 94; attitude  
 to sanctions 197; election programme of 1938 215; Scandinavian co-ope-  
 ration 230; Conservative views on Scandinavism 233—6, 240; relationship  
 with Press 289  
 constitution, revision of 12  
 Constitutional Committee 1933 & 1935 (Swedish) 179, 294  
 conventions, Article 16: for provision of financial assistance to states victims  
 of aggression 51; Aaland Convention 107  
 Copenhagen, meeting of Scandinavian Conservatives (1936) 237  
 Corfu, Italian bombardment of 50—61  
 Council (League of Nations), *see* League of Nations  
 Court of International Justice, *see* Permanent Court of International Justice  
 Covenant (League of Nations), *see* League of Nations  
 Czecho-Slovakia, attitude to Geneva Protocol 43; annexation by Germany 194  
*Dagens Nyheter* (Liberal paper) 28, 42; Geneva Protocol 45, 46; Corfu incident  
 62; policy of 79; attitude to Aaland Island question 89, 91, 92, 120, 123,  
 126, 127, 128, 260; reaction to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance  
 145, 182, 185, 188, 204, 214; criticism of foreign policy 214; favours  
 neutrality 217; attitude to Scandinavianism 237, 238; Aaland Convention  
 (revision) 246, 276; mouthpiece of People's Party 258  
 defence (Swedish) 155 *et seq.*; Commission 1919 156; Bill 1925 156, 166; 1936  
 188, 243, 280—1; Commission 1930 168, 277; and re-armament 277—82;  
 report of Defence Commission 1935 277; attitude of the different parties to  
 292, 293  
 Defence Commission (1930), report published (1935) 277; statement on  
 League 278; minority report 279  
 de Geer Louis (Prime Minister 1920—21) 108  
 Dehlgren Captain Sten (formerly Editor of *Dagens Nyheter*); article on Aaland  
 question 92, 271  
 Democracy, Western Parliamentary 11  
 democratic principles, Swedish championship of 32  
 democratisation of foreign policy 293  
 Denmark, League of Nations 14, 22; entry into League 36; Scandinavian  
 co-operation 139, 140; Greenland dispute 141; German operations against  
 222; Oslo Trade Convention 223  
*Det nye Nord* (Danish periodical) 140  
*Det nya Sverige*, article on Aaland question 119

## INDEX

- Disarmament, covenant of the L. of the Nations and 15, 32; Swedish support of 39; security and 40; disarmament and defence 155—72  
 — Conference, League of Nations (Feb. 1932) 32, 42, 53, 54, 55, 178  
 — Conference (Swedish) 167  
 Domö Fritiof (Conservative Party leader) 211, 215, 229, 262  
 economic sanctions, *see* Sanctions  
 Edén Prof. Nils (Liberal politician, Prime Minister 1917—1920) 12, 48, 85, 91, 130  
 Ehrensvärd Lt. General 98; advocate of re-militarisation of Aaland 245  
*Either-Or*, *see* Rappe  
 Ekman C. G. (Liberal politician, Prime Minister 1926—1928, 1930—1932) 23, 53—4; Government 1930 168  
 Engberg Artur (formerly Editor of *Arbetet*); League of Nations 25; Geneva Protocol 47; exponent for isolated disarmament 54; article on League in *Arbetet* 65; Aaland question 117; defence question 169  
 England, *see* Great Britain  
 Erich Prof. R. (One-time Finnish Prime Minister) 148, 245  
*Eskilstuna-Kuriren* (Liberal paper), Aaland question 129, 183  
 Essén Rütger (Right Wing journalist) *Sverige upplever världen* 1935 5  
 Estonia, Warsaw Convention 142  
 Fahlbeck Prof. Pontus, speech on Aaland question 94  
 Falk Major General 253  
 Farmers' League 20, 27, 121; opposition to Hederstierna's proposal of Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 145; Nazi sympathies 175; Government 177; Scandinavian co-operation 230, 240; accept 2nd Aaland plan 1938 252  
 Fascism 29  
 Fay S. B. *The origins of the World War* (1941) 7  
 Fennomansk, note to p. 91  
 Finland 11, 26, 29 and Aaland Islands 83—136; proclaimed sovereign state 84; Russian attitude to Finnish independence 84; Sweden recognizes Finnish independence 89; outbreak of Civil War 93; opinion on Aaland Islands question 96—7; negotiations with Sweden re. Aaland Islands 97; Govt. reply to Swedish Govt. communication of 1919 98; denies League's right to consider Aaland question 101; attitude to Swedish Govt. memorandum 104; guarantees to the Aaland Islands required by League 106; opinion re. Aaland Islands 112; Swedish Minister in Helsingfors recalled 122; Scandinavian co-operation 138, 141; relationship with Russia 140; Finnish-Polish defence alliance 141; Warsaw Convention 142; language question 224; Russian threat 225; defence 235; revision of Aaland Convention 242—77; Govt. bill for revision of Aaland plan passed by Riksdag 267—8  
 Finnish independence, *see under* Finland  
 Finnish nationalist movement 237  
 First World War, *see* War  
 Fleck *Die schwedische Provinzpresse der Gegenwart* 1939 6  
 Flyg Nils (Communist) 253, 260, 262, 263, 265, 266  
 Folkets Dagblad Politiken (Communist paper), comments on Corfu incident 61; attack on proposed Swedish-Finnish alliance 145; impartial attitude to bombing of Swedish ambulance 187  
 Foreign affairs, Swedish attitude to 31; 'Democratisation of Foreign Policy' 284, 293; Swedish Riksdag and 284—6; party politics and 287; summary of attitude of political parties towards 290  
 — Affairs Committee (Swedish) 197, 198, 210, 216, 276, 287  
 — policy, *see* Swedish foreign policy  
 Forum (Liberal paper) 19; attitude to France 28; article on Corfu incident 62; Aaland Islands question 129; article by Stjernberg on proposed Swedish-Finnish alliance 146—7

INDEX

- France, outlook in 1st World War 11; peace of Versailles 13; Swedish attitude to 28; League and security 33, 35, 40; attitude to Geneva Protocol 43; Swedish criticism of occupation of Ruhr 55—9; and Article 16 213
- Frederikshamn, Peace of 83, 91
- Gathorne-Hardy G. M. *A short History of International Affairs* (1938)
- Gefle-Posten* (Conservative paper) 125
- General Defence Association 96
- strikes and war 51
- Geneva Protocol 42—9; attitude to, British Govt. 47; Committee of Swedish experts to consider 48; significance of 49; Swedish defence and 162, 165; 1925 report on 300, 302
- German-Finnish co-operation 257
- Germany, First World War 11; blockade 23; bulwark between Russian expansionist tendencies 11, 26; Swedish sympathy for Germany 27—8; admission into League 67—70; policy of aggression 194; pressure on Sweden 207; National Socialistic views re. Scandinavianism 243; treaty of alliance with Russia 1939 272; rise of National-Socialism 277
- Göteborgs Dagblad* (Conservative paper), Åland Island 125
- Göteborgs Handelstidning* (Liberal paper), article on League based on Corfu incident 63; line taken regarding Council seats 71; attitude to Åland question 89, 120, 122, 123, 124, 126, 128; Scandinavian co-operation 140, 141; reaction to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 145, 148; favours neutrality 219; defensive alliance 232; attitude to Scandinavianism 237; favours revision of Åland Convention 246; Swedish-Finnish co-operation 255
- Göteborgs Morgonpost* (Conservative paper) 115; attitude to German National Socialism 175
- Göteborgsposten* (Liberal paper), Åland question 122
- Göteborgs-Tidningen* (Liberal paper), Åland question 128—9
- Great Britain, First World War 11; Peace of Versailles 13; Swedish attitude to 28, 304; conception of League 33
- Greece, Italian dispute, *see* Corfu; Bulgarian dispute 76
- Greenland 33, 141
- Gunnarsson G. 140
- Hagberg Hilding (Communist) 265
- Hale O. J. *Germany and the Diplomatic Revolution* (1931) 7
- Hallén Harald (Social Democrat) 169, 212
- Hammar skjöld Hjalmar (Conservative politician) 12, 25, 190, 197, 210
- Hamrin Felix (leader of the People's Party, Prime Minister Aug. 1932—Sept. 1932) 191
- Hansson Per Albin (Social Democrat, Prime Minister 1932—June 1936, Sept. 1936—1939), League of Nations 25; Åland Islands 109; defence 168
- Härnösands-Posten* (Conservative paper) 126
- Heckscher Prof. Eli, author of *After Åland* 130; freedom of the Press 178; Scandinavian military alliance 234—5
- Hedén Dr. Erik 130—1
- Hederstierna C. (Conservative politician; Foreign Minister in the Trygger Govt. 1923) 2, 26, 38, 144, 145, 146; speech proposing defence alliance between Sweden and Finland 142—3; his resignation 143; Press reaction to speech 143—6; case of 1923 291
- Helsingborgs Dagblad* (Conservative paper), comments on Corfu incident 61; attitude to National Socialism 175
- Helsingfors University 142, 149, 224
- Helsingin Sanomat* (Finnish paper) 148
- Hitler Adolf, seizure of power 222
- Hjärne Harald 118—19
- Hoare-Laval, 1936 conciliation plan 186
- Hobbes Thomas 30

## INDEX

- Höglund Z., in favour of isolated disarmament 54, 281; defence question 169—170, 239; article in *Social-Demokraten* 205
- Holland 22
- Holsti Dr. R. (Finnish Prime Minister 1924) 267
- Home policy, *see* Swedish home policy
- Rule Law of (Aaland) 248, 249
- Hudiksvalls Nyheter* (People's Party organ) 259
- Ibsen Sigurd 137
- Iceland 138
- International, The Socialist 27, 51
- arbitration court proposed by Swedish Govt. Cttee. in connection with League of Nations 14
- disputes, judicial procedure 32, 39; general act worked out 50
- Labour Organisation 208
- police force (for League), French proposal 53
- Iron ore, export to Germany 260; export from Norrbotten 266
- Isolationism (Swedish) 299—300
- Italy 29; dispute with Greece, *see* Corfu; Abyssinian War 179, 193, 305; withdrawal from League 194
- Japan, invasion of Manchuria 76; Sino-Japanese War 1937 194
- Jones S. S. *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations* (1939) 5
- journalists, cf. between independence of journalists and independence of Press 288; status of Swedish journalists 288—9
- judicial procedure in League, regulations relating to 32
- Jugoslavia, attitude to Geneva Protocol 43
- Jung General Helge 150 et seq.
- justice, principle of 33; Swedish insistence on idea of 33, 35; Swedish reliance on idea of 34; in connection with Aaland question 111, 127; central theme in Swedish foreign policy 300; Swedish conception of 301—2, 303
- Jutland 235, 238
- Karelia (Further) 97, 114, 118
- Karlstads-Tidningen* (Liberal paper), on French post-war policy 56; Corfu incident 63; Aaland Islands 120, 129; attitude to Scandinavianism 238
- Kellogg Pact 50, 51
- Kihlberg Dr. Leif, article in *Dagens Nyheter* on revision of Aaland plan 271
- Kivimäki President (Finnish) 224
- Kjellén Prof. Rudolf (Prof. of Political Science), remarks re. League of Nations 18; Aaland question 119
- Kleen Col. W. 232 *Conservative*
- Kristianstads Läns Tidning* (Liberal paper) 183, article by von Seth 235
- Lagerlöf Colonel 259, 260
- Landsting (Aaland), 1918 appeal to American, British, French and Italian Govts. 98; refusal of Finnish law granting self-government 100; members' visit to Stockholm 247; secret session at Mariehamn 247; Conscription Law 251
- Language question (Finland) 224; (Aaland) 98, 106—7
- Lappo movement 148, 149
- Larson Sam (member of People's Party) 211, 229
- Laval Government 180
- League of Nations, Sweden and 14—82, 173—221; establishment of the 14; objects of the 15; Geneva Protocol 42—9 (*see also separate heading*) Sweden's entry into League 19, 36, 38; establishment of Permanent Court of International Justice 39; moral disarmament 50; Council seats 68—77; criticism by Swedish Press 182—4; suggested reform of 191—2; Swedish distrust of 277—80; Swedish policy within 305; assembly 22, 31, 32, 33; meetings 1922 & 1923 40, 41; meetings 1924 42; League Council, criticism of composition of 22; seats on 22; composition 32;

**CORRECTION**

p. 318 *Kristianstads Läns Tidning* (Liberal paper), read *Kristianstads  
Läns Tidning* (Conservative paper)



## INDEX

- struggle about Council seats 69—70; Sweden relinquishes seat on Council 70; Council question 1926 289, 291;  
 Covenant of the League 17, 18, 19, 26, 33; Articles 6 & 7: 250; Article 8: 15, 32; Article 10: 15; Article 11: 16; Articles 12, 13: 16; Article 15: 16, 102; Article 16: 17, 198, 201, 212, 213; military sanctions 17; criticisms 22, 25; revision 25; international disarmament 32; Sweden 95; passage of troops 198; sanctions regulations, removal of 210; Swedish Riksdag discussion of changes 216; (*see also* Sanctions)
- League of Nations Association 17
- Left-Wing, views in First World War 11—12; Russia and League 26; attitude to League 18—19, 37; attitude to foreign affairs 30—31; attitude to Aaland question 88—89, 91, 95; Finnish Civil War 94
- Left-Wing Socialist Press, attitude of Aaland Islands 121
- Lindberg E. (Social Democrat), in favour of isolated disarmament 54, 170; Aaland defence 265; member of Defence Commission and advocates disarmament 280
- Linder Major General Ernst 119
- Lindhagen Carl (Social Democrat) 253, 262, 266, 286
- Lindman Arvid (Conservative Prime Minister 1920—1930) 20, 23; attitude to Aaland question 90, 94, 109, 131, 136; attitude towards National Socialism 174
- Lindskog Prof. C. 58—9
- Ljunglund Leon. (Conservative Editor of *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*) 79
- Locarno, treaty of 49—50, 68, 69, 180
- Löfgren Eliel (Liberal politician), delegate to League 43; Geneva Protocol 47, 48; article in *Forum* 62; pronouncement on League Council seats 70
- Lorents Yngve (historian) 253
- Lövgren i Nyborg (Social Democrat) 21
- Lundquist R. (Conservative) 264
- Lunds Dagblad* (Conservative, now Liberal, paper), comments on Corfu incident 61; Aaland Islands 126; attitude to German National Socialism 175
- Lundstedt Prof. V. (Social Democrat) 189
- Luxembourg, Oslo Trade Convention concluded 223
- Maisky Ivan (Russian delegate to League of Nations) 267
- Manchuria, invasion by Japan 76
- Mannerheim Field Marshal 243
- Mellersta Skåne* (Liberal paper), Aaland question 129
- Military sanctions, *see* Sanctions
- Minority report on League of Nations, quoted 23; attitude of minority groups 25
- Mohn Paul, author of *Sverige i utrikespolitiskt perspektiv* (1937) 5
- Molin Dr. Adrian (Editor *Det Nya Sverige*) 119
- Möller Gustav (Social Democratic politician) 37, 169
- Molotov V. M. 267
- Morgontidningen* (Liberal paper), Aaland defence 244
- Mosul dispute 76
- Munich agreement 194, 214, 289
- Mussolini 64, 179
- Mutual assistance, draft treaty of 41—2
- National League of Youth (Sweden's), influence of German National Socialism 175
- National self-determination, principle of 88, 97—9, 103, 111  
 — Socialists (German) 173, 174, 243, 289  
 — Socialists (Swedish) 175, 230
- Nationell Tidning* (Conservative paper) 245, 256
- Nationernas Förbund* by Theodor Adelswärd 121
- Netherlands, Oslo Trade Convention concluded 223
- Neuman Ivar, article in *Ny Tid* 117

## INDEX

- Neutral states (position of) 15, 33  
 Neutrality (Swedish) 12, 33, 103, 205, 206, 207; policy of neutrality 208, 211,  
 213—14; Defence Commission's report 1935 279  
 Newspaper Editors' Association 142  
 Nilsson-Ehrle Prof. 253  
 Non-Socialist Left (political party) 29; attitude to Corfu incident 62  
*Nord Le* (international official journal) 1938 224  
 Norden, föreningen 139  
*Nordens Arsbok* 139  
*Nordens Kalender* 139  
*Nordisk Tidskrift* 139  
*Norrbottnens Tidning* (Liberal paper) 129  
*Norrköpings Tidningar* (Conservative paper), Aaland question 123; attitude to  
 German National Socialism 174  
*Norrbottnens-Kuriren* (Conservative paper), attitude to National Socialism 175  
 Norrlin Dr. Lennart 253  
 Norway, League of Nations 14, 22; entry into League 36; Scandinavian co-  
 operation 139; Greenland dispute 141; Oslo Trade Convention 223  
*Ny Dag* (Communist paper) 244  
*Nya Dagligt Allehanda* (Conservative paper), Sweden's entry into League 18;  
 comments on Corfu incident 61, 67; Council seats 71; hostile criticism of  
 League 79; Aaland Islands 115, 116, 124, 126, 126; Scandinavian co-  
 operation 144; attitude to German National Socialism 175, 183, 186; attitude  
 to sanctions 205; secession from League 217; defensive alliance 232;  
 Scandinavian co-operation 234; Aaland defence 244  
*Ny Tid* (Social Democratic paper), article on League 65; Aaland Islands 117,  
 127, 185; Aaland defence 245  
 Olsson Olof (Social Democrat) 212  
*Örebro Kuriren* (Social Democratic paper) 256  
 Öresund 231, 232  
 Oslo, meeting of Scandinavian Foreign Ministers 209; Trade Convention 1931  
 223  
 Oslo States declaration 212, 213, 214  
*Östergötlands Dagblad* (Conservative paper), attitude to National Socialism  
 (German) 174  
*Östgöta Correspondenten*, attitude to German National Socialism 175; Scan-  
 dinavian defence 237; Aaland fortifications 259, 260  
 Palmstierna Eric (Social Democrat), Aaland Islands 126, 128, 129, 130; Swe-  
 den-Norwegian defence 137; support of Govt. policy re. Aaland plan revision  
 276  
 Paris, conference 1938 208  
 Passage of troops, and Covenant (Article 16) 198, 201  
 Pauli Ivan (Social Democratic journalist) 191, 212  
 Peace, preservation of 27; as purpose of League 33; Sweden's attitude to 34;  
 Swedish love of 298—300; views on Sweden's "Years of Peace" 299; central  
 theme in Sweden's foreign policy 300, 303  
 Peace Conference 14; Aaland Islands 98, 99, 100  
 — of Paris (1856) 83  
 — of Versailles 14, 18, 27  
 People's Party 1934 175, 201, 211; party declaration 1938 215; Scandinavian  
 co-operation 230, 237; attitude of People's Party Press to revision of  
 Aaland plan 252—3, 276; criticism of Government's Aaland policy 258—9,  
 266; opposition to Aaland plan 274  
 Permanent Court of International Justice, established 39, judicial disputes to  
 be submitted 50  
 Pehrsson-Bramstorp (Farmer's Party, Prime Minister June 1936—Sept. 1936)  
 312  
 Plebiscite (Aaland Islands) 35, 84, 99

## INDEX

- Poincaré Raymond (President of France) 28
- Poland, the League & security 35, 40; attitude to Geneva Protocol 42; discussion as to seat on League Council 69, 70; Finnish orientation towards 136, 141; question of Finnish-Polish defensive alliance 141; Warsaw Convention 142
- Position of Aaland in Historic Time, The, see Tunberg*
- Post-war policy, *see under countries*
- Pravda*, revelations regarding fortifications on Aaland Islands 85
- Press (Swedish), as source for this book 5—6; attitude to France 28; attitude to Kellogg Pact 50; attitude of various papers to League 79—81; comments on Aaland question 90—3; attitude to Aaland question 111, 115—116, 126—7, 134; discussion as to how far Swedish Press is representative of current opinion 134; sympathy with Nazi-German 176; attitude to foreign Powers 177; Abyssinian question 182, 183, 184; bombing of Swedish ambulance 187; favourable comments on League 1936 187; discussion of League policy 214; neutrality urges by 218, 219, 220; views on Scandinavian co-operation 224, 230, 237—40; Social Democratic Press and Govt. 1937 238—9; attitude to Aaland defence and revision of Convention 244, 246, 248; discussion of 2nd Aaland question 251; discussion of revision of Aaland plan 1938 252—3; Left Press supports return of Aaland Islands to Sweden 261; confidential Press conferences with Govt. 1938—39 263; negotiations with Russia 267; attitude to Russian intervention regarding revision of Aaland plan 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273; increasing interest shown in foreign affairs 287; relationship between Press and Govt. in connection with foreign affairs 288; independence of Press and journalists compared 288; independence of papers within political parties 289; influence of Press on public opinion 289, 290; weakness of the Press 290
- Problemet Sverige-Finland* (1930) 119
- Progressive party 145
- Ramel Sten (Swedish Foreign Minister) 53
- Rappard M. (Swiss commentator on work of League) 33
- Rappe Lt. Gen. Axel 150 et seq. 165, 243
- Råstock A. (Social Democrat) 265
- re-armament and defence 277—282
- Red Cross Swedish ambulance bombed 187
- "Reds" 89
- reduction in armaments, *see Disarmament*
- Remiss debates (corresponding to address debate in English Parliament) 19, 27, 37, 87, 109; on Aaland Islands 109, 131, 136; on League and sanctions 188; on relations with League 196, 201, 202; on League and Swedish neutrality 215; defensive alliance 229—30; general discussion of Aaland question 1940 262, 274
- Revision of Peace of Versailles, Swedish sympathy 27
- Rhineland, evacuation of 50
- Ridderstad E. (Conservative; Editor *Östgöta Correspondenten*) 253
- Right-Wing, *see Conservatives*
- riksdag (Swedish Parliament) 5, 20; Third Special Committee 7; Extraordinary Riksdag 12; League debates 36, 37, 197, 198, 199, 202, 216; Swedish secession from League 210, discussion of Aaland question 215, 263; discussion of Covenant changes 1939 216; co-operation in Scandinavian neutrality 224; re. second Aaland plan 251, 252, 276; speech from the Throne 1939 262; re-investigation of defence question 277; character of debates on foreign affairs 286; secret sessions 286; *see also Remiss debates*
- Ruhr, occupation of 28, 55—6
- Russia, First World War 11, 26; and League 16, 21, 178, 213; Swedish traditional fear of 11, 26, 29, 141; dictatorship in Russia 29; fortification of Aaland Islands 83; behaviour of Russian troops in Aaland 93; Finnish-Russian

## INDEX

- relationship 140; opponent of National Socialism 176; Comintern 176; threat to Finland 225; attitude to revision of Aaland plan 266 et seq.; treaty of alliance with Germany 1939 272
- Russo-German treaty of alliance 1939 272
- Saar 76
- Sanctions, military and economic, economic 16, 23; Scandinavian proposal that these should not be obligatory 39; military 17, 23, 24; Swedish opposition to 33, 41; power to enforce 23; Swedish opposition to sanctions procedure 33; Geneva Protocol 49; riksdag debates on Swedish attitude to 52, 53; sanctions and defence 176 et seq., see specially 195, 226—7; declaration by Scandinavian States 1936 195; removal of 210
- Sandberg O. E. (People's Party) 264
- Sandler Rickard (Social Democrat Prime Minister 1925—6), Abyssinian question 181; League of Nations 190, 191, 198—9, 200—1, 212, 213, 214, 216, 217; as Foreign Minister 196; Swedish neutrality 203—9, 211; Scandinavian co-operation 225—30, 233, 236, 239; revision of Aaland Convention 244, 247—9, 253, 255, 258, 262—4, 267, 269, 270, 272—4, 276
- "Scandinavia", meaning of term 138
- Scandinavian co-operation 137, 138 et seq. 222 (Chapter), meeting of Kings and Ministers 1914 137, 138; relationship between Sweden, Norway and Denmark 139; relationship between Sweden and Finland 139—40; Scandinavian defensive alliance 140; Scandinavian federal State (suggested) 140; conciliation treaties between the Scandinavian States 141; and Great Powers 198; meeting of Ministers at Oslo 209; meeting of Scandinavian Ministers 1939 218; discussions on defence 223, 227 et seq.; compensation for League 242;
- defensive alliance 140
  - federal State, suggestion of 140
  - ministers, meeting of 1939 218
  - unity, see Scandinavian co-operation
- Second World War, see War
- security (as purpose of League) 33; security guarantees 35; Article 16, Scandinavian proposals 39; and disarmament 39, 40; Geneva Protocol 42—3; central theme in Swedish foreign policy 300
- Segerstedt Torgny (Editor *Göteborgs Handelstidning*) 148, 288
- Selander Anton (Editor *Eskilstuna-Kuriren*) 253
- Seth T. von (Conservative Youth Organisation, Chairman of) 235
- Sino-Japanese War 277
- Sjöstedt Erik (Press Attaché in Paris) 108
- Skånska Aftonbladet* (Conservative Paper), Aaland Islands 125
- Small States, Swedish differentiation between 303, 304; Swedish work for Small States in League 304
- Social Democratic Press, united front re. Aaland Islands 117; Aaland Islands 126, 127
- Social Democrats 12, 13; hopes regarding League and armaments 25; and Versailles treaty 19; sympathy for Germany 27; attitude to Russia 29; strengthening of Parliamentary democratic Govt. 29; attitude to foreign affairs 30; attitude to isolated Swedish disarmament 54; attitude to Aaland question 117; opposition to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 145; defence report 158; Social Democratic Government 177 et seq.; attitude to League 201; manifesto 1938 215; Scandinavian co-operation 230; support for Govt. in revision of Aaland plan 262; Party Congress 1936, support Govt. Defence Bill 281; support of foreign policy by party Press 289; chief interest in home policy 292
- Social-Demokraten* (Social Democratic paper) 46; opposes Ramel's speech in favour of international police force 53; article on Corfu incident 64; article on League 65, 67; attitude to Council seats 71; attitude to Aaland question

## INDEX

- 89, 116, 117, 122, 126, 127; reaction to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence pact 146; attitude to Abyssinian question 182, 185; attitude to Swedish neutrality 206; attitude to defensive alliance 239
- Socialist International 177
- Söderberg Dr. Verner (journalist and expert on foreign affairs) 17, 113—14, 138, 287
- Söderhielm Erik (Conservative) 25
- Soviet Union (*see* Russia) opponent of National Socialism 176
- Spain 289
- Spanish Civil War, attitude of Social Democrats (Swedish) to 176; outbreak of 193; attitude of Great Powers to 193; attitude of Social Democratic papers to 289
- Stauning (Danish Prime Minister 1924) 225, 230, 237, 238
- Steffen Prof. Gustaf 84
- Stjernberg Prof. Nils, article on Aaland Islands in *Stockholms Dagblad* 96—7; article in *Forum* on "The plans for a Swedish-Finnish Alliance" 146—7
- Stockholm, meeting of Ministers 1938 246
- plan January 1939 (Aaland defence) 250
- Stockholms Dagblad* (Conservative paper), Sweden and League 18, 78, 79; comment on Corfu incident 61; comment on Aaland question 88, 113, 116, 124, 125, 126; reaction to Hederstierna's proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 144
- Stockholms-Tidningen* (Liberal paper, non-Socialist Left), Geneva Protocol 45; Corfu incident 63; opinion re. Aaland Islands 89, 116, 127; Scandinavian co-operation 141, 145; reaction to Hederstierna's proposed Swedish-Finnish alliance 145; attitude to Scandinavianism 237; revision of Aaland plan 246, 276
- Stridsberg Gustaf (Conservative journalist), articles on League in *Svenska Dagbladet* 78; criticism of Edén's view of Aaland question 91; independence of judgment 288
- Ström Fredrik (Social Democrat) 229
- Strömbäck Helge (Naval expert) 243
- Svensk Militär Tidskrift* 232
- Svensk Tidskrift* (Conservative paper), article by Trygger in favour of League 37; comments on Aaland Islands question 87, 130; Scandinavian co-operation 138, 234; re. Aaland Defence 243; Swedish-Finnish co-operation in 2nd Aaland plan 256
- Svenska Dagbladet* (leading Conservative paper), attitude to League 18; character of its articles on League 78; Aaland Islands 86—7, 91, 116, 121—2—3—4; reaction to proposed Swedish-Finnish defence alliance 142, 143, 148; attitude to National Socialism (German) 174; attitude to Abyssinian question 182, 183, 184, 186; attitude to sanctions 205; Scandinavian co-operation 233; Scandinavian defence 235; re. Aaland defence 245—6, 276
- Svenska Dagspressen, Den* 1938, by Ragnar Ekman 6
- Svenska Finland* (Finnish-Swedish paper) 251
- Svenska Morgonbladet* (Liberal paper), comment on Ruhr occupation 58; Corfu incident as basis for pacifist propaganda 63; Aaland question 116, 122, 127; attitude to Abyssinian question 182, 184; favours neutrality 219, 220; attitude to Scandinavianism 237
- Sventorjetski R. (Chairman of Finnish Affairs Committee) 245
- Svinhufvud Pekke (head of Finnish Govt.) statement regarding Aaland Islands 89
- Swartz C. 20
- Sweden League of Nations 14—82; Govt. Cttee re. entry into League 14; entry into League 19—27, 36; membership of League and defence 24, 66; opposition to military sanctions 23, 24, 33; conception of purpose of League 33; conduct in League 34; policy in League 31, 34, 35; weakness of position in League 35; arbitration 50, 51; debates in Riksdag re. Swedish

## INDEX

- attitude to sanctions system 52; criticism of French post-war policy 55; attitude to Corfu incident 60—1; relinquishes seat on League Council 70—1; attitude to Aaland Islands question 85, 95, 97; campaign for incorporation Aaland Islands 97—105; Swedish Govt. memorandum re. Aaland Islands 104—6; convention re. international and military posn. of Aaland Islands 107; "Informal conversations" with Finland re. Aaland Islands 97; campaign for the Aaland Islands 1918—21 97; breaking off of diplomatic relations with Finland 121; comment on Aaland question and Swedish foreign policy 132; Abyssinian crisis 181—2; Govt. memorandum re. League 192, 197; Sweden and the Covenant 195; German pressure 207; attitude to Swiss foreign policy 209; attitude to League 217 et seq.; Oslo Trade Convention 223; revision of Aaland Convention 242—277; summary of official Swedish attitude to revision of Aaland plan 275, 276, 277; policy within L. of Nations 304
- Swedish campaign for incorporation of the Aaland Islands 1918—1921 97—124
- committee for considering interest of neutrals in League of Nations 15
  - constitution, revision of 12
  - Finnish controversy over Aaland Islands 113—15
  - Finnish defensive alliance 142, 222, 241; revision of Aaland Convention 242—277
  - foreign policy neutrality, *see* separate heading; League of Nations 14—82; Swedish attitude to 27, 295—306; main tendencies 30; an expression of national character 298; central themes "Peace" and "Justice" 300; policy within League 304; utopian element in 305, 306
- Swedish Foreign Policy in the Light of the World War*, Activist publication 12
- Swedish home policy, and foreign events 12
- League of Nations Association 82
  - national character 298, 299
  - Norwegian defence question of 137
  - policy, *see* Policy
  - position, *see* under Sweden
- Switzerland, League of Nations 22; foreign policy 209
- Sydow von Oscar (Conservative politician, Prime Minister Feb 1921—Oct 1921) 48, 108
- Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (Conservative paper) 114; attitude to German National Socialism 174
- Syndicalists 240; Press suspicions of German influence in Aaland plan 260
- Systerbäck 141, 164, 238
- Tardieu André (French delegate to League) 53
- Temps, Le*, statement by Branting on Aaland Islands 95
- Thermænius Edvard *Sveriges politiska partier* (1933) 6
- Thulstrup Ake *Reformer och Försvar* (1938) 5
- Tiden* (Social Democratic paper), article on Corfu incident 65
- Tidskrift i Sjöväsendet* 232
- Times The* 288
- Tingsten General Lars, pamphlet 164
- Trade, negotiations 223; export of iron ore to Germany 260
- Treaties, League of Nations draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance 41—2; Locarno 49—50
- Troels-Lund (Danish historian) 137
- Trolle E. (Liberal diplomat politician) 44
- Trygger Ernst (Conservative leader, Prime Minister 1923—24) 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 31, 36, 37; telegram to League on 10th anniversary 38; critical article re. proposed mutual assistance treaty 42; Geneva Protocol 47; Army Organisation Bill 66; speech re. Germany's admission to League 75; speech re. Aaland question 89—90, 94; attitude to German National Socialism 174; Pro-League statement 191
- Trygger Government 156 et seq.; new Army organisation 156

## INDEX

- Tunberg Professor Sven, *The position of Aaland in Historic Times* 108, 115  
 Undén Osten (Social Democratic leader), restriction of armaments 40; proposed mutual assistance treaty 42; Geneva Protocol 47; speech re. Germany's admission to League 75; speech re. various attitudes to the peace problem 81; comments on Jung and Rappe's books on suggested Swedish-Finnish alliance 152; Abyssinian question 182; attitude to sanctions 191, 195, 197, 201; attitude to League and war 211, 212, 217; re. defensive alliance 240; Scandinavian co-operation 242; revision of Aaland plan 255, 269; speech October 1925 302
- Union between Norway and Sweden, dissolution 137, 298
- United States of America, Peace of Versailles 13; expected to join League of Nations 19, 21; Swedish attitude to 28; opposition of senate to League 18
- Uppsala (University), attitude to Aaland question 110
- Uppsala Nya Tidning* (Liberal paper), Aaland Islands 116, 120, 122, 129; Scandinavian co-operation 149; attitude to Scandinavianism 237, 238; Swedish claims to principle of justice 303
- U. S. S. R., *see* Russia
- Vasabladet* (Finnish-Swedish paper) 251
- Västernorrlands Allehanda* (Liberal paper) 129
- Vennerström Ivar (Social Democrat) 20, 26
- Versailles treaty 18—174
- Vougt Allan (Editor of *Arbetet*) 206, 207
- Wallengren Prof. S. 43
- War First World 11—14, 27; Second World 12, 171, 288; prevention of 16, 17
- Warsaw Convention 142
- Wendt Prof. Georg von (Finlander), sympathy with Aaland Islands' wish for incorporation with Sweden 97
- Western Powers, First World War 11, 12
- Westman Prof. K. G. (Conservative Minister of Justice), Aaland question 27, 87, 94, 191, 252, 269; League of Nations 44, 189, 191, 192, 202
- "White Finnish", policy 121; terror 122
- Wickman Dr. Johannes (Foreign Editor of *Dagens Nyheter*), article on Corfu incident 64; attitude to post war policy 79; Aaland Islands question 120, 128; article criticising Swedish League policy 204; article on foreign policy 214; criticism of Sweden's foreign policy 216; article in *Dagens Nyheter* on Govt. policy in revision of Aaland plan 271; independence of judgment 288
- Wilson Woodrow 13, 14, 18, 29
- Wistrand K. (Conservative) 217
- Wohlin Nils (representative of the Farmers' League) 20
- Wrangel Count Herman (some time Swedish Minister to London and delegate to League of Nations), signed document on Swedish claims to Aaland Islands 98
- Württemberg Marks von (Liberal politician, Foreign Minister in Trygger Govt.) 36, 38, 43; Scandinavian co-operation 143; Abyssinian question 182
- World War, First 11—14, 27; Second 12, 171, 173 et seq.
- A, all words beginning with A will be found under A
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