Professor R. A. Fisher,
Rothamsted Experimental Station,
Harpenden Hertz, England.

Dear Fisher:

Thank you very much for yours of January 25th including the reference to Koopman's book called Linear Regression Analysis of Economic Time Series, which I hadn't seen even as a citation anywhere. I shall look it up right away to find out what light it gives me on Frisch's Confluence Analysis. It isn't that I have any pressing need of my own to know what Frisch has accomplished but because economists are always asking me or rather telling me how important the contribution is.

I am interested in your observation that regression coefficients are thought of or used by economists in two different senses. I have been telling economists that without making any dent on them for a long time. They don't seem to know as much about statistics even in case they are economic statisticians as to realize that regression equations aren't likely to be laws or vice versa. This is probably because economists, even statistical economists, have never worked in the exact sciences which have gone ahead far enough so as to become aware of such discrepant senses with respect to equations. Of course we have to have regression equations for forecasting. It isn't at all essential that those equations should be of any importance for analytical thinking. They don't have to get back to causation. They may involve a variety of variables which are intercorrelated and which would have to be broken down into other variables for any thinking as to cause and effect and yet even if we could break down into variables that represented cause and effect those variables themselves might not be readily measurable and might not be by any particular use in prediction equations so far as I can see. One difficulty with the economists is that the theoretical economists who are really interested in laws very infrequently bother with statistics whereas the statistical economists very rarely bother with economic theory. However, I am not much if an economist and perhaps should not be expressing such opinions. I am glad you have been tabulating blood group frequencies and that they show a gradation from North to South in Great Britain and I am also glad that the Annals of Eugenics isn't at present threatened and that you have a good supply of first-class material. I presume that if the war goes on a great many sacrifices may have to be made. In fact, if aggression cannot be stopped I don't see how there is likely to be a decent future for anything and if it can be stopped the sacrifices that may be necessary to stop it will in the long run have been worthwhile. When I use the word aggression here I am not talking in any psychological sense. What I am talking about is putting your armed forces en masse in
territory that isn't yours just because you want it and I am not worrying about the kind of aggression we exercised here upon the Indians or which all advanced nations at all times seem to have exercised against poor cultures in accessible territories. It may be that we behaved very badly with respect to the Indians but that is quite a different matter it seems to me from the kind of aggression which Japan is practicing on China or which Germany was practicing on Poland or which Russia is practicing on Finland. When the organized nations of somewhat comparable civilizations pounce on one another they all suffer. It is a kind of civil war and I never could see that civil war had much justification. One can make out a case on the biological side for the taking up even somewhat forcibly of backward territory by more advanced civilizations. The smaller civilized nations like the Scandinavian states and Switzerland have made perhaps disproportionate contributions to civilization. How they are going to have any chance to continue to make such contributions without some form of collective security I don't know. It seems to me clear that Holland and Belgium and the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland cannot possibly maintain defenses individually that will protect them from aggression by far larger nations.

As to American isolationist policy, that has a long background and it is based to no inconsiderable extent upon a lack of understanding of the importance of international trade by and to parts of the country remote from the seaboard. I have been repeatedly told that from the Alleghenies to the Rockies people simply don't understand international relations and don't realize that their own markets are very largely international so that the U.S. government has a very insecure basis in its foreign relations. So far as I could see after the last war the most valid excuse for our not participating in the League of Nations was that so much of our country didn't understand anything about the matter that it would be a constant embarrassment to our Federal administration and to the League of Nations itself to have us in it. Of course it was a great embarrassment to both not to have us in it but the question was from my point of view whether it might not be an even greater embarrassment for us to be in it. I happened to be talking at a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations with Norman Davis some years ago when he was about to start to Europe on some kind of semi-official mission for the Federal government and I asked him how much backing he thought he had from the country. He replied, as I recall it, that the eastern seaboard from Virginia to Maine had a good many persons who could understand what his problems were and that the Backfire seaboard also had a good many such persons but that by and large the great central part of the country would not know what it was all about if he were free to tell them. I have just returned from a conference called by the government in Washington directed chiefly to some minor matters of internal organization where the question of foreign affairs intruded at one or two points and where it seemed to be again the well nigh universal opinion that this sort of thing was true. The people in the conference from the middle west were very high-grade people who themselves were probably as intelligent about foreign relations as those of us on the eastern seaboard but who had to admit that they were dwelling
in a part of the country where even among the upper classes any knowledge of or interest in foreign relations was practically non-existent.

We are also cursed in this country as may be the case in a great many democratic countries by political affairs. Theoretically it has always been the doctrine that politics stopped at our frontiers and that all political parties were united in respect to foreign affairs. Actually this can’t be true. When politicians are trying to be elected on a two-party system one party or the other is likely to take advantage of international as well as national policies which it may consider to be an asset to it in gaining the election. Moreover, even the leaders of these parties may take a somewhat partisan view in respect to the help they solicit from leaders of the opposition with respect to the conduct of foreign affairs. A very notable instance of this was found in Woodrow Wilson’s behavior. Before he ever went to Europe in connection with the settlement of the last war there was in this country a very strong feeling on the part of a good many persons in the Republican party that we should cooperate in determining and maintaining the peace. I don’t know to which party the then president of this university, A. Lawrence Lowell, belonged. He may be a Republican or he may be a Democrat but he had taken the position that we needed a League and that we needed a League to enforce peace. I don’t think he ever had much interest in a League that merely was a place where diplomats could express views in the hope that public opinion in the different countries would lead the different countries to insist on peace. I believe he wanted the different countries to give up enough of their sovereignty to authorize a common army and navy on some sort of quota basis under international auspices which would be available to resist the military aggression to stop it in its tracks while the matter was talked over. Unless I am wrongly informed W.H. Taft, President of the country preceding Wilson’s administration was strongly in favor of enough international organization to aid in the maintenance of peace though I am not at all certain that he went so far as to advocate an international army and navy. I think Mr. Hughes, who was the Republican candidate against Wilson in 1916 and who very nearly won, had similar views. We all know also of the very great interest of a former Secretary of State Elihu Root throughout much of his later life in international arbitration in the court at The Hague and my recollection is that he, too, was sympathetic with the general idea of some sort of League of Nations in the hope that it could be effective in the maintenance of peace. Now Woodrow Wilson made two serious mistakes in trying to realize his aims. In the first place he didn’t take to Europe with him to the Peace Conference any of these leading Republican or independent statesmen like Lowell, Taft, Hughes or Root. It is certain that he should have taken one of them as part of his official group of five. It isn’t at all unlikely that he would have done well to take Senator Lodge who was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee because the Senate had to approve any treaty and it would have been desirable somehow to lock Lodge in. Whether it would have been better to lock him in by taking him along or whether it would have been
better to look him in by taking along such a leader as Root or Taft or Hughes, I don't know. There was very unfavorable comment at the time of the fact that Wilson took practically an all democratic party group to the Peace Conference. Wilson, however, made another mistake. He had practically been served notice by a considerable group in the U.S. Senate that it was no foregone conclusion that the Senate would approve the agreements he might bring back from Europe and the constitution requires a two-thirds approval by the Senate. Woodrow Wilson landed at Boston when he finally came back and he made a speech to a large gathering. Reports of that speech stated that he said that the Senate would have to adopt the treaty without dotting an "i" or crossing a "t". Whether he said this or not I don't know but at any rate the Republican opposition under Lodge became very bitter and it was apparent very early that they controlled enough votes to make it impossible to get a 2/3 agreement. The Senate worked out some reservations and I suppose that if Wilson had accepted the reservations we should have been in the League with those reservations but he would not accept them. It may be that he was wise. It may be that it would have been simply too embarrassing to our government and to the League to havens in on terms defined by those reservations but there were many people who thought that he would have done far better to accept the reservations and then see what adjustments could later be worked out. The whole idea of being in the League ran counter to the interpretation which a great many people in this country put upon the famous farewell address of our first president urging us to avoid entangling foreign alliances. Now the League wasn't technically an alliance but it might possibly be an entanglement.

I imagine that it isn't difficult for people on Great Britain to appreciate even with a considerable degree of sympathy our isolationist attitude even if they don't like it. As a matter of fact British policy for a century and a half, I think, has itself been isolationist in respect to Europe in that Britain has not gone on to the Continent effectively except when she thought her own long-range interests made it indispensable that she should go. The sea was not as good a barrier to her as the oceans are to us but it was quite a barrier to any foreign invasion of Britain. What has changed the situation so much for Britain, I think, is the development of aircraft. She certainly can't be isolated from aggression by air much more than Holland and Belgium can be. It is not much further from Continental military air fields to Great Britain than it is to nations right on the Continent. The oceans still are a great barrier so far as we are concerned. We must be expected to be weighing Great Britain in the abandonment of isolation. I don't believe that even the non-isolationists in this country are persuaded in any considerable numbers that we should go into this war any more than they were in 1914. The thing that in 1914 excited this country was the invasion of Belgium. There was a good deal of excitement about that. It might have been possible for the President of the U.S. to have got his country into the war over the invasion of Belgium if he had been determined to do so but I think he would have had very hard sledding. Our people
of course haven't liked the treatment of Austria or of Czechoslovakia or of Poland by the German government but somehow as I read the papers and sense the sentiment, the general feeling has been that while it is just too bad it doesn't particularly concern us. We feel a long way from middle Europe. There has been a very different reaction as I sense it to Russia's war against Finland. I don't mean to say that our country wants to go to the help of Finland in any military way; that also seems a long way off but I do think that for one reason or another or perhaps for no reason at all there was an even greater sentiment against the sort of thing Russia is doing in Finland than there was against the sort of thing Germany did to parts of Europe which had been German or Austrian before 1914. Now of course Finland was part of Russia for a long time. The whole thing may be irrational and I may be wrong in sizing it up but it looks as though the real sympathy of the U.S. didn't go out to nations suffering from aggression in any wholehearted way until Finland was attacked. I don't suppose we shall do anything about the matter except watch and perhaps furnish a little non-military help of an unofficial character in Finland.

With best wishes,

Yours very sincerely,

[Signature]