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Schreiben Ernest Tennant an William Goode (23.03.1920)

Brief

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Regest:

Ernest Tennant war ein britischer Industrieller und Bankier, der während den 1920er Jahren immer wieder nach Deutschland reiste und enge Verbindungen zu dem Land knüpfte. Ab 1934 war er ein führendes Mitglied der Anglo-German-Fellowship, die sich für eine Verständigung und intensivere Kontakte zwischen Großbritannien und dem nationalsozialistischen Deutschland einsetzte. Erst ab 1935 begann sich Tennant zumindest vom Antisemitismus der Nationalsozialisten zu distanzieren.

Gleichwohl handelt es bei dem hier präsentierten Brief an William Goode, einen wichtigen Funktionär der britischen Relief-Organisation, um ein interessantes Stimmungsbild der deutschen Lage aus britischer Perspektive. Bemerkenswert ist insbesondere die Auffassung, eine Hilfe der deutschen Wirtschaft könnte britischen Wirtschaftsinteressen dienstbar sein. Tatsächlich wurde in Deutschland jedoch das Engagement ausländischer Firmen mit großem Argwohn betrachtet und führte zu Debatten um eine "Überfremdung" der deutschen Wirtschaft.

Ew. A Tennant

9 Mincing Lane

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23rd March, 1920

Dear Sir William Goode,

With reference to your recent request to me, I have now returned from abroad, but only spent four days in unoccupied Germany, all in Berlin, and was so busy that I had not time to study the food and economic situation sufficiently thoroughly to feel able to write any report on them. In any case, the Revolution would have upset the forecasts one might have attempted. The impression I got was, that the food conditions in Berlin were slightly, but not very much, better than they were in February 1919, while against this must be placed the great increase in cost of living.

The economic situation, from the point of view of exports from Germany, was much worse than I have expected. Germany has nothing left to export, and is very short of metals, chemicals, textiles, and coal for her urgent domestic requirements. I was approached by the representative of an Iron Works Combine embrace fourteen of the largest enamel and hollow ware works (most of them situated on the Elbe) as to whether it would be possible to find a British firm or group willing to supply Hematite iron in exchange for the bulk of the profit on the finished goods, as the works were mostly standing for lack of iron.[2]

The chemical works I visited had nothing for export and were in a bad way for delivering the raw materials they were actually making for lack of drums, due to the shortage of steel sheets through lack of iron. There is an acute shortage of essential chemicals like soda chrystals, and caustic soda; also of sulphuric acid (owing to lack of pyrrhites) and of sulphate of copper for the vineyards and potato crops. All this points to the impossibility

of Germany being in a position to export in order to barter goods, or obtain money for essential raw materials or foodstuffs.

From the gossip I overheard, but which I did not actually verify, I gather that the Inter-Allied Mission of Control are breaking up a certain number of German factories considered a war menace. Some of the plants I heard mentioned would be of great value to Allied Industries. For instance, I heard that the great Haber Nitrogen factory at Bayers Leverthusen[sic!] works were going to be smashed up, and I heard of a chlorine factory which was in danger of being destroyed. There is a chlorine shortage in this country at present, and I should have thought, in view of the Findings of the Nitrogen Products Committee, that the Haber plant should be marketable over here. It strikes me (without knowing anything about the political side of the question) as a great pity that any plant should be deliberately destroyed without Allied firms being first given the chance of tendering for the purchase of same,[3]and thereby possibly helping Germany to purchase vital imports and, at the same time, increasing urgently needed Allied production. It struck me that Germany is in a most chaotic condition and that her finance and moral have gone to pieces. I don't see how she can recover by her own effort, or indeed where sufficient effort could come from. Someone must extend a hand to her from outside, and lead her for a time more or less entirely. Hans von Gwinner, son of the head of the Deutsche Bank¹, lunched with me, and he pinned all his hopes on the scheme I see from the papers, you are working on, that rich neutrals plus the United States of America, should come forward with a big loan. I must confess I have returned with the feeling that the food situation is secondary to, and dependant on the general economic or business and financial situation in Germany which is in a sad mess. I cannot help thinking that much more might be done towards employing German labour by developing the sending of raw materials of all kinds and turning them into finished goods in german[sic!] factories. Some special arrangements for retaining entire control and thus assuring the re-export licence would have to be come to with the German Government, and I think some special trade-mark, such as "indemnity goods", anyway something less objectionable than "made in Germany"² should be devised[4]for this particular trade which might be propoganded[sic!] to encourage the purchase of such finished goods. Any such arrangement should, if necessary, include sending in with the raw material, the necessary lubricating oil, driving belts, etc., and possibly the food for the workmen, and perhaps leaving as part payment, a portion of the finished goods. It would be fairly easy to make out a list of raw materials of which there is both an available surplus, and a demand for the finished goods, and specialise first on these. It would, no doubt mean, calling some prominent German business men in consultation. It strikes me, that the big business man in Germany has not, so far, been made as much use of as he might have been, by the Allies. I rather doubt whether a man like Hugo Stinnes, for instance, would really be considered damned politically through being a Capitalist. After all, he certainly neither belongs to the military nor to the socialist parties, must have great organising abilities and is not, as far as I know, politically compromised. And there must be many others like him.

This has developed into a very long letter, which I feel on re-reading, is rather cheek to write to you. I hope you will forgive any suggestions that are absurd; but I am very much out of touch with what is actually being done.

EW. A. Tennant

1 Gemeint ist Arthur von Gwinner, der 1894 in den Vorstand der Deutschen Bank eintrat und von 1900 bis 1919 als deren Vorstandsvorsitzender amtierte.

2 Das Label "Made in Germany" geht auf den 1887 beschlossenen "Merchandise Marks Act" zurück, demzufolge bei Handelswaren unmissverständlich das Herkunftsland angegeben werden musste. Zunächst als Mittel gegen Billigkonkurrenz gedacht, wurde "Made in Germany" bald zu einem Qualitätsnachweis und schuf neue Probleme für die Briten im internationalen Handel.