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Schreiben Eric Phipps an J. Ramsay MacDonald (28.08.1924)

Brief

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Regest:

In diesem Schreiben an den britischen Premierminister (in Personalunion Außenminister) J. Ramsay MacDonald berichtet der Bevollmächtigte Minister in Paris, Eric Phipps, über ein Gespräch, in dem der ehemalige Arbeitsminister und Schatzkanzler Sir Robert Horne seiner Sorge vor industriellen Zusammenschlüssen der deutschen und der französischen Industrie Ausdruck gab. Wichtig ist dabei insbesondere der Hinweis auf unterschiedliche Lohnniveaus und die Möglichkeit einer Abschließung von Märkten durch die Bildung internationaler Kartelle.

British Embassy

Paris

28th August, 1924

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that Sir Robert Horne called at this Embassy this afternoon and had a conversation with the Commercial Secretary.

Sir Robert expressed his great anxiety at the possibility of agreements being reached between French and German industrialists, which would result in the loss to the United Kingdom of important markets in both countries. He was himself particularly interested in iron and steel, but he thought that the situation was the same in the case of other industries such as wool.¹ In reply to a remark by Mr. Yeames² that such agreements could hardly have a definite character before the discussions next October between the French and German Government on the subject of a commercial treaty, Sir Robert said that, in his opinion, private agreements might be concluded between firms, with provisions for modifications according to the rate of duty eventually fixed by either Government. He laid stress on the difficulties caused to British trade by the lower rates of wages ruling in Germany and in some cases in France³, and mentioned, in particular, a case in which a German firm was in a position to offer its manufactures at a price which was lower than the bare manufacturing costs of the same goods in the United Kingdom with no margin for the smallest profit.

1 Die Textilindustrie gehörte in den 1920er Jahren zu den großen "Sorgenkindern" der britischen Wirtschaft. Traditionell zu den wichtigsten Exportbranchen gehörend, litt sie während der 1920er Jahre unter wachsender internationaler Konkurrenz und einer sinkenden Nachfrage.

2 Personalie konnte nicht geklärt werden.

3 Tatsächlich lag Mitte der 1920er Jahre das Lohnniveau in Deutschland unter dem in Großbritannien. Die deutschen Reallöhne erreichten 80-90 % des britischen. Bei den Stückkosten lag Deutschland bei ca. 80% des britischen Niveaus. Vgl. *Broadberry/Burhop, Real Wages*, 410, 415. 417.

[2]

Sir Robert enquired whether the Commercial Department of this Embassy was in direct touch with the Commercial Secretaries at Berlin and Cologne. Mr. Yeames replied that as a rule this was not the case, as reports were sent to the Department of Overseas Trade which, if it thought fit, sent copies of despatches of particular interest to Paris, Berlin or Cologne as the case might be. The Department acted as headquarters and centralised information. Sir Robert seemed doubtful whether this method was always the most satisfactory and whether the direct exchange of information between officers in France and Germany would not be preferable.

Sir Robert Horne afterwards expressed to me the misgivings which he felt in regard to the likelihood of France-German industrial agreements between individual firms. I inquired how he thought we could prevent them and he was constrained to admit that he has no means of our being able to do so. He said, however, that if ever we got wind of any negotiations with any such object in view it would be a great help if we could inform the Department of Overseas Trade and this I promised should be done, though I pointed out the unlikelihood of our getting to know of such negotiations beforehand.

I have, etc.

(Sgd. Eric Phipps)