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Schreiben F. Thelwall an das Ministry of Labor (13.06.1930)

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Formalia:

Regest:

Die hier präsentierte Quelle ist ein Beispiel dafür, wie genau britische und andere internationale Beobachter die Verhältnisse in bestimmten deutschen Schlüsselindustrien beobachteten. Als bemerkenswert wird hervorgehoben, dass es zum ersten Mal gelungen sei, Lohn einschränkungen in der traditionell stark umkämpften Eisen- und Stahlindustrie durchzusetzen. Das wurde aus wirtschaftsliberaler Perspektive als wichtiger Schritt hin zu einer wirtschaftlichen Erholung betrachtet. Die Lohnfrage in der deutschen Eisen- und Stahlindustrie konnte darüber hinaus aber auch potentiell Rückwirkungen auf Tarifverhandlungen in Großbritannien haben, obwohl Thelwall darauf hinweist, dass eine Auswirkung auf das Preisniveau aufgrund umfassend kartellierter Märkte nicht zu erwarten stände.

[1]

Berlin, 13th June 1930

Overseas Trade (B). 228

Sir,

I have the honour to report that the German Minister of Labour has declared the recent award which was given in the North Western Group of the German iron and steel industry as binding.

2.¹ The factor of greatest importance embodied in this award is that the rates for piece work, which were fixed at the figure ruling on the date when Herr Severing made his famous award 18 months ago, may now be reduced below the level. Otherwise the tariff agreement, which runs until the end of September remains in force, as does also the provision that rates must be at least 15% above the minimum tariff rates.

3. The second most important feature is that the wages payable in the lowest category of unskilled labour, which were from 60–63 Pfennigs per hour, are increased to 64 Pfennig plus 15 % for piece work. A similar increase is made in the lowest categories of time workers and skilled workers whose rates are put up from 66 and 67 Pfennigs to 68 Pfennigs. The duration of the new tariff is to be until the 30th May, 1931.

4. Additional advantages are accorded to workers in regard to the payment of work on Sundays,[2]the granting of leave and allowances in respect of children, but no details concerning these items have been published, beyond the statement that the allowance for children shall in future be paid up to the end of the attendance at a secondary school instead of at an elementary school as hitherto.

5. The employers agreed also to reduce the wages and salaries of other employees who do not work under a tariff as from the 1st July, in such a way that a saving of 7 1/2 % on the total expenditure on wages and salaries will be effected. It has been decided not to lay down any hard and fast rule for the carrying out of the reduction, but to leave it to the individual works to do this in accordance with the special conditions obtaining in each. It is anticipated that the saving in wages in the North Western group will amount to about 2,500,000 Marks per

1 Es gibt keinen Punkt 1 in der Quelle.

month. It should be remembered that the reduction in wages applies only to the North Western Group, while the decrease in the price of iron takes place throughout the whole industry.

6. The employers have agreed to lower the prices of iron products with retrospective effect as from the 1st June to an extent beyond the sum saved by the reduction of wages and salaries. The Minister of Labour has reserved the right to have the prices which may be fixed in future examined by economic experts. The prices will thus be lowered a month before the cut in wages become effective.

7. Although nothing definite has been stated, it seems to be assumed that the reduction in prices will amount^[3] to about 4 Marks per ton of bar iron with corresponding decreases in other manufactures. The surcharges for Siemens Martin material is being reduced from 8 to 6 Marks per ton. It is still unsettled whether the price of pig iron is to be reduced. In this connection, it may be noted that on the 13th January, 1928, the price for bars and sections was increased by 3 Marks per ton, for hoop iron by 4 Marks and for semimanufactures by 2.50 Mark, while on the 11th May, 1928, there was a further rise of 4 Marks per ton for bars and sections, 6 Marks for hoop iron and 4 Marks for semimanufactures. Since then prices have remained unchanged at 141 Marks per ton for bars ex Oberhausen and 135 Marks ex Neunkirchen.

8. It does not seem probable that the new price reduction will have any great effect on German iron and steel exports, the price of which will, as in the past, continue to be regulated by international agreements and, as far as finished products are concerned by the export rebates as the real significance of the present step lies in the fact that the Minister of Labour has for the first time sanctioned a reduction of wages and that one of the most important groups of employers has consented to reduce prices. It is hoped that this lead may be the beginning of a similar movement in other industries and may thus prove to be the turning point in the present crisis. Whether these hopes are justified only time will show, but they^[4] are certainly doomed to disappointment unless the advantages which accompany a decrease in price are really passed on to the ultimate purchaser. One of the main causes of the stagnation on the German home market is that, while a great deal has been done to cheapen production, the benefits thus obtained are lost on the passage of the article from the manufacturer to the public. This does not necessarily mean that the individual intermediaries make too much profit, but is often due to the fact that there are too many of them.

I have the honour to be, with the highest respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble Servant

F. Thelwall

Commercial Counsellor.

Information received this morning from H.M. Vice Consul at Essen in reply to a telegram, states that conferences of the iron associations at present taking place at Duesseldorf regarding the reduction in salaries, wages and iron prices. The information contained in this despatch must, therefore, be regarded only indicating the general tendency of the award and price reductions, while some time must yet elapse before details become available.