Report from Undersecretary for Overseas Trade at Commercial Relations and Exports Department, Board of Trade, R.J.W. Stacey, to the Foreign Office, copied to D. Wright, 18 April 1952

[…]

Mr. Perry of Cambrian Dress Fabrics Ltd., who has just been to the Moscow Conference and returns again this week-end, called to see me this morning. He had not been to Moscow before. The origin of his visit lay in a conversation between an M.P. and a customer of his factory (he is a clothing manufacturer) who asked him whether he would be interested to receive an invitation from Moscow. He says that he went to Moscow because he saw a chance of getting orders for his factory, and in particular work for a new Government standard factory which he has in South Wales and which should go into operation about mid-summer. He said that he fully recognised that what the Russians were offering could be pure propaganda but politics was not his business. He needed markets for his textiles and here there seemed to be a chance of picking up something. He fully expected that since he had taken the initiative to go to Moscow he would get the “pickings” of any orders that were going. Since his return he had got in touch with many firms (including e.g. Courtaulds) and doubtless a large number of samples would be sent to Moscow as a result of what he had reported. He was finding himself, however, overwhelmed with enquiries to which the only defence would be to disconnect the telephone. The Russians were certainly not taking the line that he was the only channel through which they would do business, nor that had he the slightest desire to see anything of that sort happen. He had quite enough to do to cope with his own affairs.

2. Mr. Perry went on to say that so far as Russia was concerned the contracts to buy from Russia and to sell to Russia would be quite independent. The Russian organizations with whom he was in touch in Moscow did not talk politics. On the other hand there was plenty of speechifying about the need to remove the strategic controls. So far as the talks with the Chinese were concerned he knew only about the textile arrangements. Here there was a link established between purchases and sales but he did not know anything about the other side of the picture.

3. Mr. Perry said that he had seen Mr. Vinogradov of the Soviet Trade Delegation before going to Moscow. Mr. Vinogradov showed him copies of letters which he had sent out to textile firms in this country in the past few months. Mr. Perry did not think that these letters were particularly well phrased and he was not surprised that the recipients had not felt very enthusiastic. For his part Mr. Vinogradov said that replies received had been unsatisfactory. Mr. Perry suggested that the Soviet Trade Delegation was not well equipped to cope with textile business and that the reason why the Russians had not shown interest was that they had not yet been able to get across to possible sellers an idea of the sort of things in which they were interested. These seemed to be woollen and worsted piece goods, woollen and worsted yarns and wool tops. They might possibly be interested in heavy overcoats. In general they were only after high quality goods.

4. It was clear that no firm deal has yet been concluded with the Russians about textiles. Mr. Perry hopes that concrete business will emerge from his return visit.

5. The object of Mr. Perry’s call was to let us know what had happened in Moscow and to make sure that he had Board of Trade blessing for what he was doing. I said that the Board of Trade view the possible sale of textiles and other consumer goods to the Soviet countries or to China with full approval. Naturally if in the case of the Chinese deal there were goods expected to be sent in return which were subject to our strategic controls the parties must reckon with the possibility of licences being refused, but not, of course, for textiles.

(Copy to: Mr. D. Wright, F.O.) (R.J.W. Stacy) 18th April, 1952.

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