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May 9, 1938.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

The Secretary
The Under Secretary
The Counselor
Mr. Dunn
Mr. Moffat

I see from the press that Dr. Eckener will be in Washington today and intends to have certain conversations with regard to helium for the Zeppelin service between Germany and the United States. As I have known Dr. Eckener for years and perhaps know him as ~~well as~~ any American except Mr. Henry Mann, I think I should give you the following information.

Dr. Eckener is a man who in the old Germany and under the present regime has held an extraordinary position of public esteem both as a man and because of what he has done for Zeppelin construction and navigation. Before the death of President Hindenburg, Dr. Eckener, Dr. Schacht and General von Seeckt were considered as the most likely successors in moderate quarters for President Hindenburg. Dr. Eckener himself is a man of great honesty of purpose, very modest and unassuming and representative of the best there has been and is in Germany. Until recently I know

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that he made no concealment in private of his utter disagreement with practically all that the present government in Germany is doing, internally and externally. He is not today, I believe, a National Socialist and has perhaps just as little sympathy as before with the internal program of the present government. There is a question, however, whether, in view of the recent successes of German external policy, he may not, like a good many other Germans, have been converted to the external policy of expansion.

Dr. Jeidels, formerly one of the greatest bankers of Germany but who has now been obliged to give up all his work in Germany, was in to see me a few days ago as he is temporarily in this country and he told me that the most significant development within Germany recently has been that so many former conservatives who feared the external program would lead to war have now been reconciled to that program as a result of the occupation and annexation of Austria.

In conversations which I have had with Dr. Eckener in the past, he has frequently discussed his plans for a commercial Zeppelin service to this country. It is of course his whole life. His interest is in the development of a commercial Zeppelin service. He realizes, however, the military value which the already accomplished voyages of the Zeppelins have and that this knowledge and experience and use

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of Zeppelins can be turned to military use whenever the German Government so wishes. It cannot be left out of our consideration that there are Germans who have made these trips in the Zeppelin to this country who can turn their knowledge of the navigation of Zeppelins and of New York over which they have flown on a number of occasions to direct military use. It cannot be left out of account that one such Zeppelin might be able to wreak untold damage in a section of New York which they know well from flights over it, and before this Zeppelin could be destroyed. No one knows this better than Dr. Eckener who has referred to it in private conversation.

Dr. Eckener is held very properly in just as high regard in important circles in this country as he was and probably is in many circles in Germany today. A certain value therefore is given to what he says in this country. I think in all prudence we must recognize that we may not be able further to put this faith and credence in what he says. Dr. Eckener is serving the German Government. He can only say what he is told to say. The last time I saw him, which was a little over a year ago, he intimated to me that it was a question how much longer whatever he might say to me could be accepted by me as an expression of his convictions. In other words, I took it that he was letting me know as well as he could that he was being forced into a position of doing and saying things in which he had no heart. I know that he conveyed

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this same thought to another American with whom he had had close contact. While it is important for us to keep this in mind during any conversations he may have here, it is equally important that the substance of what I say concerning his conversations with me should be ~~kept~~ in the most strict confidence as the consequences otherwise might be most disastrous to this really worthy great man.

I have no comment to make as to whether or not we should let Germany have helium for this Zeppelin. There are those in the Department and in other branches of the Government service who know more about this and can speak with more authority than I. I only wish to make it clear that Dr. Eckener is not a free instrument and that, great man as he is, he is speaking for the German Government and not out of his own heart or convictions. One thing is certain and that is that if we grant the authorization for this initial shipment of helium, we shall have to continue with further authorizations and reckon with the definite possibility of a certain stock being built up in Germany. Even if this stock would not be sufficient for further Zeppelins, it will establish the possibility of the operation of one Zeppelin which on one successful voyage could accomplish incalculable damage. Whether we should take this risk merely to facilitate a Zeppelin service which has no commercial importance either to

ourselves

ourselves or to Germany and which involves definite military risks is subject to grave doubt. Certainly even if any promise were given in good faith that the Zeppelin would not be used for military purposes, this promise would carry no weight in case of war. It is, therefore, not a matter of questioning the good faith of Germany in any promises which she might give for we know in case of war such promises seem to have no validity.

Perhaps I should add that certain financial interests in this country are already particularly interested in this Zeppelin service. The medium has been Mr. Henry Mann, who was born in Germany, came to this country as a young man, was naturalized and was for many years the principal European representative of the National City Company. Since the liquidation of that company he has been the representative of Brown Brothers, Harriman and Company with headquarters in Berlin and London. He is an extraordinarily well informed person and I believe a good American. I do not know whether he still has this definite financial contact with the Zeppelin Company and whether he is in any way involved in the present negotiations.

G. S. Messersmith.

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