

'Christian Democrats approve the Schuman Plan against the national interest' from L'Unità (17 June 1952)

Caption: On 17 June 1952, the Italian Communist daily newspaper L'Unità deplores the adoption of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) by the Italian Senate.

Source: L'Unità. Organo del partito comunista italiano. dir. de publ. LAJOLO, Davide. 17.06.1952, n° 142; anno 29. Milano. "I d.c. approvani il Piano Schuman contro gli interessi della Nazione", p. 6.

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Another majority coup in the Lower House

Christian Democrats approve the Schuman Plan against the national interest

Giuseppe Di Vittorio calls on Parliament to postpone its ratification

Rome, 16 June. — Comrade Di Vittorio, leader of the CGIL [Italian Trade Union Confederation], wound up the debate on the coal and steel pool in the Lower House with a major speech summarising the reasons for the nationwide workers' opposition to the Schuman Plan. He proposed that the ratification of the treaty be deferred so that the other members of the Community could be asked to grant the same guarantees to the Italian coke-producers and steel industry as those made to Belgian coal mining.

Mr Di Vittorio said that the ratification of the Schuman Plan is one of the most significant bills presented to the Italian Parliament during this legislative session, and swiftly disposed of the arguments put forward by the parliamentary majority in favour of the pool. To assert that it is the economic basis of European unity and an instrument for peace amounts to no more than empty words, given that the pool embodies a policy of dividing the European people and preparing for war. The truth is that the Schuman Plan will subordinate the Italian economy to the control of American and Franco-German coal and steel trusts for half a century.

The pool sets out to reinforce profitable iron and steel industries and eliminate the less profitable; since the Italian iron and steel industry cannot withstand competition from the Germans, it is already evident to all what the consequences of the Schuman Plan will be. This is recognised explicitly in a report by the American High Commission in Germany in which we read that the Germans 'will benefit from the elimination of inefficient companies in other countries.' This is the voice of the master — exclaimed Mr Di Vittorio — and the words mean that all our iron and steel plants, from Ilva to Terni, are to be sacrificed in the interest of German companies.

Mr Taviani (Christian Democrat) intervened: This is not correct; if you read the majority parties' report you will see the guarantees that are provided for our industry.

Mr Di Vittorio: Those are merely words, and we do not trust your words. The fact is that there is not a single guarantee in the report. In Italy, over two million people are permanently unemployed, two million temporarily unemployed, and entire regions are impoverished and seriously underdeveloped. Because of this, we must evolve a policy of full employment like the one outlined in the Plan for Work, and to do this we need first of all to strengthen our iron and steel industry. The pool, however, sacrifices that industry by placing it at the disposal of foreign capitalists, who will certainly use it to the detriment of the Italian economy.

The governing majority, continued Di Vittorio, asserts that, even though our iron and steel industries may be sacrificed, we shall in return receive low-cost steel so that our metallurgical factories can operate. But given that the pool is dominated by German trusts and American capital, who is to say that they will not sell us their finished or semi-finished products at a higher profit rather than supply us with cheap steel? We are also assured that, in return for our joining the pool, trade will be liberalised and the movement of goods will increase.

The working class, Di Vittorio said, has never adopted a hard-and-fast stance to protectionism or free trade. The workers' parties have decided on their approach to the issue of trade in the light of events at the time. So we cannot be accused of having been free-traders only when it was a question of fighting against the protectionism advocated by the monopolies. But today an Italian iron and steel industry exists and must be defended, especially because it is to a great extent state-owned. The issue of trade must be seen in the context of national interests and our production needs. Besides, if the Government were genuinely concerned with increasing our foreign trade, why did it turn down the official offers from the USSR and the peoples' democracies at the Moscow Conference, offers that gave Italy the chance to acquire raw materials (especially iron ores) in exchange for agricultural and industrial products? There is no specific national interest that justifies our joining the pool. We could comfortably remain outside it, following the example of

Atlantic nations like England and Canada, and of large coal and steel producers like the USSR and the peoples' democracies.

It cannot be argued that it is just the Communists who are contrary to the Schuman Plan. In Germany, it is supported only by the powerful capitalists directly concerned, and it is also challenged by the Social Democrats, who justly see it as an obstacle to the country's unification. In France, even the Creusot complex industrialists are opposed to the pool because they are directly threatened. In Belgium, the pool is opposed by members of all the parties. In Italy, the overwhelming majority of the workers and even Confindustria [the Italian Employers' Confederation] have declared their opposition to the pool. Senator Jannaccone, the authoritative Liberal economist, has said that the plan is the outcome of an American idea, and exemplifies French legal quibbling and German obscurity. What is certain is that there is nothing Italian about it! Nor is it just, continued Mr Di Vittorio, to accuse us of 'collusion' with the manufacturers, since it is well known that the working class struggle against them is directed towards achieving a fairer division of income from industry, not to destroy industry.

In Italy, the Schuman Plan is supported only by the ruling political class. All the countries taking part in it have obtained special guarantees. The Italian Government has not secured and, what is worse, has not even asked for the smallest guarantee. For these reasons, while nonetheless maintaining our opposition, I am suggesting a compromise solution that could secure unanimous consensus: that we defer the ratification of the Schuman Plan in order to ask the other members of the pool to offer the Italian iron and steel industry and its coke-producers at least the same guarantees as those obtained by the Belgian coal mines.

The speaker then wound up the debate by stating the three reasons that had induced him to present his compromise proposal: the opportunity to eliminate a grave source of concern among workers; the impossibility of pledging the Italian economy for 50 years without consulting the people through the ballot box; and the danger that the Schuman Plan, by aggravating the division of Germany, might increase the risk of a world war. Let the majority decide on this proposal. But it is our duty to say, concluded Di Vittorio amidst applause from the opposition, that, whatever the outcome, the workers will continue to fight in defence of Italian industry and national independence.

Giuseppe Di Vittorio's postponement proposal was defeated by the majority, frustrating what was perhaps the last chance to guarantee the survival of our most important industrial structures.

The majority then approved the ratification of the Schuman Plan in a secret ballot.