

'To be or not to be' from Le Monde (11 December 1951)

Caption: On 11 December 1951, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the importance of a positive vote on the Schuman Plan by the National Assembly, both for France and for its place in the world.

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To be or not to be

by Rémy Roure

The incidents that took place at the end of the debate on the Schuman Plan, although worthy of a satire by Courteline, nonetheless did not destroy the grandeur and the dignity of the occasion. For this we must thank the National Assembly. What emerges clearly from this event is the need for a serious revision of its Rules of Procedure. However, an end to the debate itself is necessary, and this will come with tomorrow's response to the vote of confidence sought by the President of the Council.

An adjournment, as Mr René Pleven has stressed, is not a response. To take the postponement motion literally would be putting the cart before the horse, and, at all events, no one is fooled. The adjournment request is just camouflage for a refusal. But refusal is a serious matter: it amounts to overturning the entire French foreign policy of the last few years and to repudiating all our efforts to build a Europe. Mr René Pleven, we were reminded yesterday, put it very clearly: 'Adjournment would mean the end of Europe.'

This is, in fact, the crux of the matter. Will there be a Europe, or, more precisely, do we believe that our continent can recover, find its way and fulfil its mission? What we are being asked for is an act of faith.

No one will be surprised that the Communists have refused to comply: they believe in other gods. Were Western Germany, or even the whole of Germany — for the way is still clear — to be tied to the West, this would go directly against Soviet world policy, which can be summed up in two words: pan-Slavism combined with pan-Bolshevism, either one supporting the other. It is paradoxical that such a simple thesis should be defended by Mr Pierre Cot, with a great deal of talent it must be said, by means of 'capitalist' arguments.

From the point of view of the RPF — the Rally of the French People party — and of some right-wing members, the issue is evidently seen differently. What must be feared are partisan ulterior motives, a wish to topple a rather shaky minister, because the difficulties in replacing him may well be a help where internal politics are involved. There exist some parties that go against nature and seek a vacuum — and this vacuum is found only too frequently. We are well aware that there is also in the RPF another ambition, one which is national and which has been expressed very well by Mr Léon Noël: that of pre-eminence in Europe stemming from a rejuvenated France, a France that is as great as it has often been in the course of its history — and which is still (who could doubt it?) the head and the soul of our continent. France cannot be present at world events without participating in them, a mere onlooker from its crumbling ramparts; nor can it hazard its economic autonomy or its sovereignty by subjugating itself to the law of some higher authority. Such is the argument. It rests on a thoroughly respectable sense of independence, one which may not be lightly dismissed, because it corresponds to one of the deepest of French aspirations.

However, at this juncture, can our country act alone and create Europe around itself by means of simple juxtapositions? Europe cannot be imagined without Germany, that much is clear. Rejection of some sort of international central control would quickly encourage the unrestrained and unregulated rebirth of an industrial and military Germany that would not be slow to dominate a 'balkanised' Europe. The only way for a regenerated Germany to remain, if not powerless, then at least harmless for our children and grandchildren, is still, at least for as long as man can predict, to bind it closely to a Europe that is organised and as strong as possible. The Schuman pool is one part of its foundations.

Doubtless this economic cooperation agreement has its drawbacks and its dangers. We are taking part in an adventure where the best man will win. One part of French industry fears European central control, and we know that eastern chambers of commerce are less than enthusiastic. But is there not another type of dirigisme that is private and more questionable and that could remain a strong temptation without excluding any danger — on the contrary?

Our plea is that we consider that we are being offered an opportunity, perhaps an unrepeatable one, to limit at least these dangers and to give substance to an ideal that is no longer just a dream. Could it be given

substance by creating a supranational State that was based on nothing tangible?

This is what is being asked of the National Assembly. No doubt, considerations stemming from internal and partisan politics will play a role in this decisive vote. We dearly hope that they will be set aside so that the response is clear — abstention is but an excuse. Adjournment entails the rejection of a genuine Europe. A large majority is needed to ratify an agreement that is a French initiative and of value to both Europe and the world.