

Report by Committee of Officials (2 June 1950)

Caption: On 2 June 1950, in the United Kingdom, the Committee of Officials submits a report to HM Treasury in which it advises the British Government not to participate in the Schuman Plan.

Source: BULLEN, R.; PELLY, M.E. (Ed.). Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series II. Volume I: The Schuman Plan, the Council of Europe and Western European Integration May 1950 - December 1952. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986. 1023 p.

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Report by Committee of Officials

Secret TREASURY CHAMBERS, 2 June 1950

Integration of French and German Coal and Steel Industries

The French Government have indicated to us that it is essential that we and other countries concerned should agree to a communiqué about the Schuman coal/steel proposals in the form given in Annex I to this note, on the ground that this expressed the unity of view which is indispensable for the successful prosecution of the negotiations. They have further indicated that, if the United Kingdom Government is unable to subscribe to this communiqué, the French Government will open negotiations on the stated conditions with the other countries which have accepted them as a basis. In that event they will keep the United Kingdom Government informed of the progress of negotiations in their desire to enable the latter to join in whenever they feel able to do so.

2. In our view this latest French proposal is basically no different from the earlier one. It essentially seeks to commit us in advance of negotiations to the principle of pooling European steel and coal resources and to the surrender to an independent authority of sovereignty over an important sector of our economy. We think it wrong to commit ourselves in this way, not because we necessarily preclude any possibility of some measures of pooling or some surrender of sovereignty, but because we think it wrong to pledge ourselves on these matters without knowing more precisely the nature of the commitment we are being invited to accept.

3. On this basis we would, therefore, have to contemplate the prospect that the others may go ahead without us. Our provisional view is that the economic arguments in favour of coming in or staying out of an international association of the kind contemplated by the Schuman plan are not conclusive one way or the other, and on this score there need be no cause for alarm if at this stage the French decided to proceed without us.

4. The main issues are really political. The exchanges with the French Government have brought out that their proposals, which started in a Franco-German context, have now been given a wider application. It is not merely a pooling of resources, but also, in the first place, the conception of fusion or surrender of sovereignty in a European system which the French are asking us to accept in principle. M. Schuman's original memorandum said in terms that this plan would be a step towards the federation of Europe. It has been our settled policy hitherto that in view of our world position and interests, we should not commit ourselves irrevocably to Europe either in the political or the economic sphere unless we could measure the extent and effects of the commitment. This is in effect what we are now being asked to do. It is a commitment of this kind which in essence the French Government is now seeking, and at the very moment when the decision has been taken to develop and give greater meaning to the Atlantic community.

5. The most important aspect of the French proposal is that it represents a new and constructive approach to the problem of Franco-German relations. This is very much in our interest, from the political, as also the defence, point of view. If we abstain from the present phase of the negotiations the possible effects of our action on the progress of Franco-German rapprochement will have to be borne in mind.

6. The other Governments who have accepted the French communiqué in principle are not in the same position as the United Kingdom Government either politically or economically. Yet even they have not accepted the French formula without mental and, in the case of the Dutch, explicit reservation. We shall be kept informed of the progress of discussions; and it is unlikely that by refusing to join in now on the French terms we shall be prevented from participating in European discussions in some manner later on.

7. It will be seen, therefore, that there is a real difference of view between ourselves and the French which cannot be glossed over by mere verbal ingenuity in the drafting of a communiqué, and in our view it is better to face this issue now rather than later. For the above reasons we recommend that the latest French proposal should be rejected.

8. In order to avoid misunderstanding and misrepresentation of our position, it will be essential that our attitude should be made clear in a public announcement. A draft of such an announcement is appended (Annex II) for consideration.

Signed, on behalf of the Committee, E. E. Bridges