

'From the Monnet to the Marshall Plan' from L'Humanité (12 October 1947)

Caption: On 12 October 1947, in an article published in the French Communist daily newspaper L'Humanité, Benoit Frachon, General Secretary of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), condemns the American stranglehold on the French economy resulting from the implementation of the Marshall Plan.

Source: L'Humanité. Organe Central du Parti Communiste Français. 12.10.1947. Paris: L'Humanité. "Du plan Monnet au plan Marshall", auteur:Frachot, Benoît.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

From the Monnet to the Marshall Plan

The huge concern generated by Paul Ramadier's astonishing speech is still far from subsiding.

According to authoritative industry representatives, the proposed policy is a recipe for disaster. For the working class, the threat of factory and worksite closures implicit in the words of the President of the Council necessarily raises the spectre of mass unemployment.

A recipe for disaster! And that is no exaggeration. A recipe, too, for undoing, in pursuit of goals that are only too clear, all that has been achieved by the working class in the name of reconstruction, saboteurs notwithstanding.

Dam-building will be scaled back or stopped, and the production of equipment for hydroelectric power stations will suffer the same fate. That is what Ramadier's statement comes down to when the fine-sounding phrases are removed.

And yet, a shortage of electric power has thrown the whole of our industry into partial disarray. Yet the shortfall in our coal production is a recognised fact.

We are short of dollars, and yet we are having to buy coal in from America, and the little coal that is coming our way from the Ruhr is billed in dollars, at sky-high prices.

Moving ahead quickly with the development of our hydroelectric stations would significantly reduce our reliance on those imports. That is probably why Mr Ramadier is announcing that the first round of savings will be on these facilities.

For years now, Mr Ramadier, like all the others, has bemoaned our technology deficit. That is, no doubt, why he is announcing action to cut back French investment designed to make up that deficit. The industries in question will always have the option of seeking the investment which the US trusts long to make in our country.

It is true that the American trusts have good reason to view with disquiet the modernisation of our iron and steel industry and the progress in our vehicle production techniques, at Renault and Berliet in particular.

They are planning the high-speed reconstruction of industry in the Ruhr, they can build enough vehicles to sell some to us. So why consider developing our own 'competing' industries?

The day before Mr Ramadier gave his speech, Philippe Lamour, CGA General Secretary, addressed press representatives. He quite rightly pointed out that one of the main obstacles standing in the way of higher agricultural output was the inability to supply farmers with the equipment that they need. 'We have 200 000 unmet requests for mass-produced tractors,' he explained.

Mr Ramadier's answer is to say: 'We don't have any dollars.' But, at the same time, he announces that factories are to close because orders will come to a halt.

The idea might, conceivably, have dawned on him that the same factories could be used to build the tractors for which the farmers are asking. The fact is that some of the firms concerned had completed their retooling programme and were in a position to start mass-production of tractors — only to be prevented from doing so.

Just imagine. The Americans build tractors. We, on the other hand, are out of dollars. Worry not! With enough concessions, the Americans will lend us some.

Meanwhile, as this policy of liquidating our main industries emerges ever more clearly, never a day passes without an official announcement that we are to be visited by American delegates, experts or otherwise.

Mr MacMartin, President of the Export-Import Bank, is to visit our main industrial centres.

The foremost figures in the US banking and industrial world are pressing our Ministers to reduce our customs tariffs. 'You promised us,' they say. They insist on creating the conditions required for investing capital, their capital, safely and soundly in France.

People throughout the land have the disagreeable impression that our country is turning into some sort of huge livestock market in which dealers eye up their purchase before slaughter, chaperoned by none too demanding vendors who themselves talk down the price of their merchandise.

But vendors and buyers alike should watch their step: they may be overwhelmed in the rush.

And so it is that our Ministers, having chattered for months about the Monnet Plan, having sung its praises politically, are now quietly putting it to rest, leaving the Marshall Plan as its sole inheritor.

The fact that Jean Monnet agreed to join the funeral march is immaterial.

It simply means that drawing up a plan is one thing. Having the energy to carry it through, whatever the hurdles on the way, is quite another.

When we took part in the drafting of that Plan, we made clear that we would be vigorous in our denunciation of any attempt to deprive it of the independence which we believed was of the essence.

I imagine that Mr Monnet has not forgotten my recent words to him, in which I reasserted that determination, adding that I had no illusions as to the direction that government policy was taking at the present time.

Things are moving fast. The dollar-rich who now rule supreme are intensifying their demands.

The working class is not used to capitulating to blackmail.

The Monnet Plan as an annex to the Marshall Plan! That is no aim for the working class.

The working class wants recovery with independence, national sovereignty with the emergence of a genuine democracy.

Benoît Frachon