

‘Industrial federations and the Schuman Plan’ from L’Usine belge (10 March 1951)


Caption: On 10 March 1951, the industrial journal L’Usine belge reports on the concern of the national industrial federations of the six countries involved in the Schuman Plan, in particular regarding the powers of the future High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community.

Source: L'Usine Belge. Organe de la métallurgie, de la construction mécanique et électrique des manufactures et des industries connexes de Belgique. 10.03.1951, n° 1209; 28e année. Bruxelles: L'Usine Belge. "Les fédérations industrielles et le Plan Schuman", p. 1.

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Industrial federations and the Schuman Plan

We have already reported several times that the Schuman Plan was about to be signed, but it is still being negotiated and talked over between the parties involved.

The industrial federations of the six countries concerned by the Schuman Plan (France, Italy, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) have confirmed their support for the ‘Schuman idea’ and wish to see it reach completion. But they nevertheless think that the provisions of the draft treaty are unrealistic. The idea is to invest a High Authority, with six to nine members, with the power to manage as it sees fit the coal and steel industries of the six countries taking part in the scheme, once they have formed a sort of supranational monopoly. There is a serious risk that such provisions would lead to stagnation in these industries, whereas in the present circumstances every possible opportunity for increasing output should be seized.

The federations have proposed making various amendments to the draft treaty on the lines of the principles set out below. To be constructive, they have kept their suggestions as concrete as possible.

1. The industrial federations believe that the High Authority will not be able to carry out its task without the support of the firms themselves. The federations are asking for industry to be allowed to cooperate actively in drawing up the measures designed to ensure that the common market operates smoothly. They may of course form groups, in line with the laws of their respective countries, but each company will remain at liberty to join such groups or not. Groups that cooperate in the tasks stipulated by the treaty will, when executing such tasks, come under the control of the High Authority, which may step in to make up for any failure to act on their part or to veto what they do.

Because of the scope of the powers vested in the High Authority by the treaty, the federations, in the event of a serious, long-lasting dispute between the High Authority and the industry, see a need for the firms involved to be able to state their case, on both the form and content of any decision, to a body that will settle the matter in line with the demands of the general interest;

2. The powers vested in the High Authority must not have the effect of giving it de facto control over the management and the ultimate fate of the companies within its jurisdiction;

3. Caution demands that in committing themselves for 50 years to such a major undertaking, beset by so many unknown quantities, the Governments should reserve the option, particularly at the end of the transitional period, to make any changes to the initial system that experience may show to be necessary.