

'Schuman Plan: time to get on with it!' from Het Vrije Volk (22 July 1950)

Caption: On 22 July 1950, in the Dutch daily newspaper Het Vrije Volk, the Netherlands Socialist MP Marinus van der Goes van Naters, Delegate to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, comments on the issues at stake in the negotiations under way in Paris on the Schuman Plan.

Source: Het Vrije Volk. 22.07.1950. [s.l.]. "Plan-Schuman: nu doorzetten!", auteur:Van der Goes van Naters, Marinus.

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Schuman Plan: time to get on with it!

by M. van der Goes van Naters

Once again there is a short break in the Paris talks on the Schuman Plan. So where are we now?

In the previous — second — period it seemed that Belgium and the Netherlands had a few objections to the French proposals. Those objections were exaggerated in the press, with one American paper even accusing the Dutch of being ‘sticky’. But the objections were certainly not to the underlying principles of the French plan. All those at the conference, France, Italy, West Germany and the Benelux countries, were agreed at the outset that a partial transfer of national sovereignty to a supranational authority was the only effective way of pooling the European coal and steel industry.

Dutch acceptance of this principle is of course entirely consistent with our foreign policy which, ever since the van der Goes–Serrarens motion was passed by the Second Chamber in April 1948, has after all regarded the aim of European functional integration, overseen by a European federal authority, as one of its prime objectives. The principle of transfer of sovereignty agreed in Paris will need to be firmly upheld; this is vital if the new authority is to have sufficient powers to effect the proposed pooling of Europe’s heavy industry.

Scrutiny — but how?

But when people talk in a democratic society about ‘authority’ and ‘power’, the words which immediately follow are ‘scrutiny’ and ‘responsibility’. And opinions are now divided in Paris on how Schuman’s proposed new authority is to be held accountable and who is to supervise it.

The French say: direct scrutiny by a parliamentary assembly, chosen by the parliaments of the participating countries. Belgium, clearly supported here by the Netherlands, feels that the governments of the participating countries should continue to have a major role in supervising the authority and that the real responsibility should lie with them rather than with the parliamentary body.

This way of thinking has its attractions, but also its dangers. The attraction is that scrutiny of the authority by the Western European governments would create a bridge between the Schuman Plan on the one hand and the OEEC Committee of Ministers on the other hand. The authority and the OEEC share the same objective, namely fostering of European economic integration. In their turn these Ministers, who form a nucleus within the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, could be a link to this Council of Europe, just as the Western European members of the ‘Schuman Parliament’ could be part of the Council of Europe’s Assembly.

Dangers

But there are dangers too in the Belgo-Dutch proposal. If the governments have a role in scrutinising the authority this could also inhibit matters, for example if a government were able to exercise a kind of veto in order to get round regulatory measures by the authority that it did not like. It looks very much as if the Belgian reaction stems from this fear of regulation.

The Socialist view on this is well known. Measures to pool the European coal and steel industry? Wonderful. But at the same time there must be a policy of full employment and social security, something to which the Schuman Plan also says it aspires. If we are to have more than fine words, and actually implement such a policy, then a certain amount of regulation is necessary.

If the proposed authority has no regulatory power, the result is bound to be economic and social chaos.

The Schuman Plan has the potential to be a sound basis from which to build European unity. But economically reactionary interest groups, often masquerading as advocates of a ‘free market economy’, must not be allowed to sabotage this plan for a supranational authority with real powers and subject to proper political scrutiny. So let us get on with it!

