

'For or against the pool?' from the Courrier métallurgique (July 1950)

Caption: In July 1950, as negotiations on the Schuman Plan are held, the Belgian monthly bulletin Courrier métallurgique reports on the debate over the powers of the High Authority.

Source: Courrier métallurgique. Juillet 1950, n° 2; 1^e année. Bruxelles: Alexandre Devis et Cie. "Pour ou contre le pool ?", p. 1.

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For or against the pool?

The publication of the French experts' memorandum on the Schuman Plan has stimulated renewed interest in this issue, which is so vital for the future of Europe. It would be an exaggeration to say that the provisions that it contains have been greeted with enthusiasm. On first reading it is hard to guard against the apprehension that it may lead to the creation of a wide-ranging dirigiste policy on an international scale.

This reaction stems from the powers allocated to the High Authority of the pool. This will be made up of just ten members, appointed without regard to national representation, solely on the basis of their competence. It will be up to the participating governments, to the Foreign Ministers in particular, to choose the most qualified candidates. The elected representatives will be given collective powers that in no way link them to their country of origin. Decisions to intervene will be taken by majority, with no possibility of a right of veto being used. What is more, the High Authority will be controlled by an Assembly — an offshoot of the Parliaments of the various nations present — which will meet once every year. The general responsibility of the Authority will be complemented by an appeals body to which States and possibly private businesses may have recourse.

It is known that the aim of the Plan is to contribute to a policy of economic expansion, full employment and raised standards of living for workers. The High Authority will widen its jurisdiction to cover prices and wages, as well as the creation of framework programmes for production and modernisation. It will be able to make loans and grants to businesses in order to facilitate investments, help with essential redevelopment and stimulate the development of new activities. In the same vein, it will have at its disposal financial resources from payments made by certain favoured industries and it will be authorised to issue loans.

For a transitional period, there will be a compensation fund to procure short-term aid that is gradually phased out for undertakings that are initially unable to adapt to the single market.

In order to establish the single European market, States will abolish customs duties and all the existing quantitative restrictions.

As it appears now, the Plan will require contracting countries to relinquish a degree of sovereignty. It is for this reason that, last Saturday, its requirements were subject to very close examination in the select ministerial committee. The misadventure that took place recently in Paris must not be repeated: Belgium, which is too rich in the eyes of some, was close to being particularly badly rewarded for its goodwill and its unselfishness by finding itself assigned obligations within the European Payments Union that exceeded its possibilities.

An official communiqué published on Saturday has thrown light on a number of major difficulties. It is important that our leaders make their objections absolutely clear, for, regarding the principle, Belgium cannot be suspected of nourishing the least hostility. The Prime Minister repeated this formally in the Chamber last Friday. It is essential that the Plan be a common undertaking, in which advantages and sacrifices apply to members in their entirety and not to this or that one in particular. A spirit of solidarity but also of equity must inspire its promoters; only then will this idea, which will see Europe united once and for all, come to fruition.

As for the rest, the current events in Korea amply prove, if the need still remains, that in the face of the Bolshevik peril which spews forth its destructive lava at any appropriate opportunity, the pressing duty of the Western nations is to unite in order to avoid being submerged.