

Interview with Georges Berthoin: relations between the ECSC High Authority and European trade unions (Paris, 22 July 2005)

Source: Interview de Georges Berthoin / GEORGES BERTHOIN, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : François Fabert.- Paris: CVCE [Prod.], 22.07.2005. CVCE, Sanem (Luxembourg). - VIDEO (00:05:00, Couleur, Son original).

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_georges_berthoin_relations_between_the_ec_sc_high_authority_and_european_trade_unions_paris_22_july_2005-en-5747861b-ab55-476e-b01e-1447bd314668.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Georges Berthoin: relations between the ECSC High Authority and European trade unions (Paris, 22 July 2005)

[Étienne Deschamps] Practically speaking, given this positive, effective, privileged relationship between the High Authority — and, in this instance, Jean Monnet, Paul Finet as well — and the trade unions and employers, how did matters stand and develop? Did these people meet one another in the Place de Metz, the Seat of the High Authority? Did people go straight into the Seat of the High Authority? Did this relationship proceed naturally, directly, simply or was everything already highly formalised hierarchically, very administrative?

[Georges Berthoin] No, not at all. At first, everything was most straightforward and natural. Mind you, I'm not sure what is meant by 'natural' in those circumstances, but there were no barriers, neither hierarchical nor bureaucratic barriers. Monnet had established excellent relations with trade union circles thanks to the French National Planning Board, since even the Communist CGT union participated in the Planning Board committees. And Monnet had a very good personal relationship with those people. I suppose there was... What struck us was that we showed — I use 'we' collectively, of course — we showed that we were serious and that we were not playing politics. In many countries the unions were subject to national political conditions; this or that party was supported and so forth, which was more tricky. Not in this case. We were put to work in support of a cause and, very quickly, the unions, which were much more sensitive to the themes of peace, of harmony among people, of international solidarity, felt at ease. It was something new. The employers were used to getting together, but in a setting that was clearly rather different. So, in their eyes, it was a positive, a constructive adventure, and Monnet, together with all the members of the High Authority, made them feel — and this was the reality — that they were co-authors of what was in the process of being created. This consultation did not take place for politeness' sake, or because it was compulsory. It took place through conversations and dialogue where there was real content and one felt that it served some useful purpose. What is interesting is that the Communist trade union confederation, the CGT, which, for ideological reasons, denied the very existence of the coal and steel Community, unofficially sent delegations that were often provincial delegations, so to speak. This was because the practical problems that we were trying to solve affected the working class.

For instance, if you study the Treaty of Paris, you will note that the social aspects of this Treaty are extremely important. In it there was the whole policy concerning retraining schemes for workers; there was the subject of intervention when a mine or a steelworks shut down as a result of the common market; there was this entirely new principle of triple responsibility. There was the question of State responsibility, company responsibility and European responsibility regarding incomes and employment. It was an entirely new idea, one which happened to have been taken up by Pierre Mendès France when he became President of the Council. The social aspects were innovatory, they were practical and presented in all seriousness, with no trace of demagoguery. The trade union organisations appreciated that. So much so that the Italian CGT, which was Communist-oriented, was the first to move forward on the issue of European unity, and Italy was more important than France in the Communist hierarchy. It was they who convinced the *Kominform*, the World Federation of Trade Unions based in Prague, that the start of this European adventure was a good thing for the working class, that the people in charge were responsible, and that no one was trying to — contrary to what was said afterwards — ... that it was not anticommunist, not at all, that it was an attempt to sort out practical problems. So, little by little, there was this progress, which meant that the non Communist unions present in our institutions felt much more at ease than in the beginning. This is an aspect that has been completely forgotten today, but in the beginning it was the reality.