

## 'What about this Schuman Plan then?' from Le Phare Dimanche (19 November 1950)

**Caption:** On 19 November 1950, the Brussels weekly newspaper Le Phare Dimanche reports on the negotiations under way in Paris on the preparations for the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

**Source:** Le Phare Dimanche. Hebdomadaire indépendant de Bruxelles & du monde. 19.11.1950, n° 255; 5e année. Bruxelles: Le Phare. "Et ce Plan Schuman?", auteur: Politicus.

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## What about this Schuman Plan then?

The delegates of the six countries which have signed up in principle to Mr Schuman's 'revolutionary' scheme resumed their discussions in Paris last week. Although large numbers of people in French industrial and political circles have spoken against Jean Monnet quite noisily on many occasions, he is chairing the talks. He handed the delegates, who were probably not expecting so much, a new document that once again sums up progress in the negotiations and makes a show of optimism which many of the delegates do not share. Agreement, in fact, is far from unanimous on the main points which are still being fought over, and it has become quite clear that the initial excitement has given way to feelings that are much more. With good reason, actually. What is more, the position adopted by Mr Pleyen's government regarding German rearmament is not likely to simplify matters, especially on the political level where France is isolated, to no one's advantage, even its own.

To an increasing extent, the Schuman idea — which had been very favourably received in Washington for what it implied in favour of a strengthening of the so-called unity of Western Europe — springs mainly, on the French side, from various political aspirations. The economic aspects of the question have not been completely overlooked, certainly — thank goodness for small mercies — but it is nevertheless rather obvious that those aspects are taking second place as more a means to an end than an end in themselves; so it is not surprising that there is some lively opposition from precisely those circles which are much more interested in the economic side of the plan than in its political aspects. I am talking about the representatives of professional organisations and, especially as regards Belgium, the representatives of the coal mining organisations who have had a chance to express authorised opinions stripped of any pretence.

For these people, the problem of the disparity in the prices of steel products and, especially, of coal has not been solved. It also seems unlikely that it will be, either in the near future or in a manner which could satisfy all the contracting parties. The proposals made to the Belgian delegates, particularly by the French and Germans, going as far as, and even including monetary pressure ('Devalue — you've seen it all before!'), looked exactly like barely veiled disapproval of the effort the country, and especially its industrialists, have made on social security. Some fine French politicians who would like to be described as being of a socialist bent, I have to say, all but blamed us for having such an extensive social security system, while some other politicians, German this time, blamed us for being so considerate to our workers. Enough of that.

There's more. In September, a speech by Dr Lehr, one of the major figures in the German steel industry, brought confirmation of what could be seen as Germany's relentless opposition. Pointing out that the Schuman Plan involves having the same conditions of production in all the member countries, the same access to raw materials, the same standard of living, the same price for all the commodities concerned and the abolition of customs duties, Dr Lehr set out his country's out-and-out hostility to any increase in the prices of German iron in order to bring them up to the same level as the French price. He went on to say: 'A rise in the price of steel would have a marked effect on our exports. Our system of wages and prices would go haywire. Inflation would be bound to kick in.' The fact that Dr Lehr was made a government minister shortly afterwards gives added weight to his statements, which were directed at French prices but concern Belgian prices even more, since they are even higher.

Observe in passing how fiercely the Germans defend the interests of their re-emerging heavy industry. Recent international developments — especially Western plans for rearmament — are changing the profile of the problem even more radically. So much so, in fact, that it is easy to believe that the Schuman Plan, as it stands, no longer has any reason for existing, at least in the projected form. Recent statements by Mr Schuman himself — and our apologies for not sharing his optimism — do not alter matters at all. It is quite obvious that, if it is to work, the coal-steel pool ought to operate according to a very strict process. The French Foreign Minister talks blithely about flexibility, which means absolutely nothing. The word has more to do with diplomacy, and we sincerely hope it does not mislead any of the delegates, whose job is to talk to each other primarily on the basis of specific facts and figures.

So here we are at a time when the question of finding markets is less important than the question of stocks of raw materials. Also, American rearmament plans are throwing economic prospects in Europe into a state of

upheaval by casting the resources each country concerned possesses into a sort of alliance. With no Schuman Plan in existence, the Americans seem to be taking no notice of it any longer. That would to some extent explain France's opposition to the Acheson-Marshall plan. That's where we stand at the moment.

Taking all this into account, it is obvious that the point of view which holds sway in industrial and official circles in Germany is extremely important. In practical terms, it is not hard to predict that the talks from September onwards will mainly be a face-to-face between the Germans and the French, as the Belgians cannot really join in until we know exactly what is to come out of these hard-headed discussions. Now, even if the Germans are still 100 % partisans of a tightening of the political ties which could unite them to France, they are still more and more opposed to an equalisation fund which, they think, could force them to make an annual payment of 600 million marks for coal and about 200 million for steel. To put it another way, penalising the Ruhr's natural advantages, at the very time when German trade policy is entirely based on low prices for manufactured goods, plus competition, directed against Paris's partners and even, very often, against the United States — as we saw only the other day when the supply of locomotives to South Africa was put out to tender.

'We hope we can agree,' is the reply journalists get in Paris from certain officials when they bring up the question of equalising the costs of producing coal. Of course! But agree how, when markets all over the world are suffering from a shortage of fuel, to such an extent that no one is even talking about shutting down loss-making mines any more? Certain 'well-informed' circles last week talked about the possibility of the final treaty being drawn up by the end of the year. We are entitled to wonder if that isn't rushing a bit too fast into the work, and especially into making forecasts. As things stand now, the Schuman Plan is still just a question mark.

A question mark which still makes you wonder ...