

‘Managers not politicians: Europe is revolutionised ’ from Die Zeit (18 May 1950)

Caption: On 18 May 1950, the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit outlines the ‘revolutionary’ aspects of the French proposal for a coal and steel pool in Western Europe, known as the Schuman Plan.

Source: Die Zeit. 18.05.1950, Nr. 20; 5. Jg. Hamburg. "Manager statt Politiker: Europa wird revolutioniert", auteur:Tangel, Richard , p. 1.

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Managers not politicians: Europe is revolutionised

The cabinet plan presented by Foreign Minister Robert Schuman to the press representatives assembled in the Clock Room at the Quai d'Orsay on the eve of the London conference was bold and modern in a way that would not be expected of the French, who since the war have been accused of always taking decisions too late. 'The French Government', he said, 'proposes to place Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole under a common higher authority, within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.'

Anyone who remembers the severity with which Paris used to speak about the Franco-German war will welcome the tact with which that unfortunate past is recalled here. And it is apparent from this detail how extremely serious is the attempt by the Bidault cabinet to bring about a lasting reconciliation between Germany and France. Federal Chancellor Adenauer warmly welcomed the French offer that same evening at a press conference in Bonn, at which he announced the unanimous decision by the Federal Cabinet to join the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. These French and German decisions are undeniably also the culmination of the progressive policy which was launched with the interview with the Federal Chancellor by Ernst Friedlaender which we published in *Die Zeit*.

The atmosphere of the London conference, which was not generally expected to produce anything exciting, was also electrified by the announcement of the two events. 'There is a Locarno spirit in London', wrote the Stockholm newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*; and now it is not only in London, but also in Germany, where we have broadly been longing for a reconciliation with France since 1945, however hopeless this has sometimes seemed. However, there is a crucial difference between the current situation and Locarno. Locarno was about improving the atmosphere between our two countries by easing the pressure on Germany of the costs resulting from war and occupation. This time it is not about German demands or requests, but a French offer to take initial steps towards an economic union and thus to create the focal point for a European federation.

The proposal to place production of coal and steel by all the countries concerned as a whole under a higher authority is not only courageous, but also unusually modern. The higher authority will be composed of independent persons appointed by the governments on an equal basis. Its decisions will bind France, Germany and the other countries involved. The authority will be headed by a chairman, who will be chosen by common agreement between the governments. It is stated that 'the authority's decisions will have executive force in France, Germany, and other member countries.' This is followed by a somewhat cryptic sentence: 'Appropriate measures will be provided for means of appeal against the decisions of the authority.' However, it is clear from the statements made above that the existing governments have to surrender some of their sovereignty to an international authority. In addition, an arbitrator will be appointed who, after the governments have concluded treaties on the essential principles and undertakings, will participate in the negotiations required to settle details of their application. The arbitrator must see that the agreements reached conform with the principles laid down, and 'in the event of a deadlock, he will decide what solution is to be adopted'. Any government veto is thus ruled out! Lastly, a representative of the United Nations will be accredited to the authority, and will be instructed to make a public report twice yearly, giving an account of the working of the new organisation, particularly as concerns the safeguarding of 'its specific objects'.

Anyone in France or Germany who might still live in fear that either of the countries could try to dominate the other in the future, and to some extent make itself the master of continental Europe, should take a close look at these provisions. In order to rule out such possibilities, it is demanded that the members of the higher authority are to be independent. But what this means in reality is not made expressly clear in the French proposal. One can only guess, looking at the tasks with which those members will be charged.

'The task with which this common higher authority will be charged will be that of securing in the shortest possible time the modernisation of production and the improvement of its quality, the supply of coal and steel on identical terms to the French and German markets, as well as to the markets of other member

countries, the development in common of exports to other countries, and the equalisation and improvement of the living conditions of workers in these industries.’ It is further stated that ‘in contrast to international cartels, which tend to impose restrictive practices on distribution and the exploitation of national markets, and to maintain high profits, the organisation will ensure the fusion of markets and the expansion of production.’

It is thus clear what independence is expected of the members of the higher authority under the French Government plan. They may not represent national demands unilaterally, that is to say they may not be officials beholden to the individual states, or representatives of national industrial associations. They may not be supporters of a protective national customs policy. This is a very sensitive point, as they may be neither old-school capitalists nor socialists, whose current programme of full employment can be implemented only through extreme protection of the domestic market, which explains why socialists in most countries today are so nationalistic. Neither representatives of employers’ organisations nor trade unionists could be members of the higher authority. Nor can representatives of parties be appointed, because they might form interest groups across national borders on the basis of their programmes. In a word, the French proposal intends people without any political or economic ties to be selected on the basis of their expertise and not their passion. In his well-known book, Burnham called them ‘managers’.

No one can therefore be surprised that opposition to the French plan comes primarily from the socialists, in Germany, in France, in Britain and in Scandinavia. They have always fiercely fought the possibility of a third way in addition to socialism and capitalism. What is it all about then? The aim is for individuals, under their own responsibility and to the best of their conviction free of ties, to exercise a function handed over to them by democratically elected governments. Is it perhaps not the case that parties and lobby groups such as employers’ associations and trade unions would do well not to assert their demands in relation to the setting-up of the authority? Would it not be good if, rather than mass lobby groups, which are always power-hungry, free individuals, a council of upright figures, watched over the reconciliation of Germany and France?

It is precisely this proposal that makes the Schuman Plan so courageous and so modern.