

Record of a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: extract on the Schuman Plan (London, 10 May 1950)

Caption: On 10 May 1950, at a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, leading British ministers comment on the declaration made the previous day by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, and criticise the French initiative to create a coal and steel pool in Europe.

Source: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, [s.l.], Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, Records of the Cabinet Office, CAB. Anglo-French discussions regarding French proposals for the western European coal, iron and steel industries; Schuman plan, CAB 21/3235.

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Record of meeting at N°1 Carlton Gardens on the 10th May, 1950

The following were present:

The Prime Minister

Mr. Morrison

Mr. Bevin

Sir S. Cripps

Mr. Shinwell

Sir W. Strang

Mr. R. E. Barclay

[...]

The meeting then turned to consider the French announcement about their proposal for the establishment of a system of unified control over the production of steel and coal in France and Germany, and in other European countries if they would come in.

There was general agreement that the French Government had behaved extremely badly in springing this proposal on the world at this juncture without any attempt at consultation with H. M. Government or the U.S. Government. It was also agreed that until the proposal had been most carefully considered in all its aspects - economic, strategic and foreign political – by the various Departments and Ministers concerned, it was essential to adopt a very cautious and non-committal attitude.

It was agreed that the Chiefs of Staff should be asked to consider and report on the strategic aspect of the proposal. In this connection Mr. Shinwell said he wondered to what extent the French initiative had been inspired by preoccupations about defence.

Sir S. Cripps expressed the view that the proposal was the result of collaboration between M. Bidault and M. Monnet. It would, of course, get over the difficulty of the Saar. In his view, the most dangerous feature of the proposal was that it would apparently make it possible for Russia to get a foothold in the control of the European steel industry. Some discussion ensued as to exact significance of the reference in M. Schuman's statement to the possibility of the adhesion of countries in Eastern Europe.

Mr. Morrison said that the proposal might have been primarily economic in its origins, but it clearly had most important political implications. Sir S. Cripps agreed that these were the most alarming feature of the proposal. It looked like a challenge to the U.S. and the U.K. It was agreed that it showed a regrettable tendency to move away from the conception of the Atlantic community and in the direction of European federation.

The Prime Minister agreed to give instructions for the necessary interdepartmental and ministerial discussions to be instituted forthwith.