

'The Ruhr has replaced the United States as France's main coal supplier' from Le Monde (11 May 1950)

Caption: On 11 May 1950, the French daily newspaper Le Monde gives an account of production at the German collieries situated in the Ruhr basin in the late 1940s.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 11.05.1950, n° 1 645; 7e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La Ruhr a remplacé les Etats-Unis comme principal fournisseur de la France en charbon ", auteur:R.D. , p. 3.

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The Ruhr has replaced the United States as France's main coal supplier

Below we publish a list of the main Western European coal and steel producing countries, together with their output figures for the years 1946, 1947, 1948 and 1949.

These statistics were published in the second annual report of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the Paris-based umbrella organisation for the 18 nations receiving aid under the Marshall Plan. It is interesting to compare them with American production figures.

If the figures relating to the main Western European producer countries in 1949 are added together, we arrive at a total that is close to 420 million tonnes for coal, as opposed to 434 million tonnes in the United States (which was affected by a long period of strikes), and about 42 million tonnes for steel, as opposed to 70.6 million tonnes in the United States.

Coal production

Steel production

Last year, West Germany produced more steel than France (excluding the Saar). In fact, for the past five months it has regularly been outstripping our output: 765 000 tonnes in November as against 723 000 tonnes in our country; 812 000 tonnes as against 792 000 tonnes in December; 907 000 tonnes as against 772 000 tonnes in January 1950; 899 000 tonnes as against 722 000 tonnes in February; 1 015 000 tonnes as against 475 000 tonnes in March (lengthy strikes).

Since the end of the war, the various problems connected with coal and steel have more frequently divided France and Germany than united them. From September 1949 onwards, the dispute between the two countries regarding the dual pricing of German steel became particularly serious, and it played an important part in the negotiations for the devaluation of the mark. At present, the tendency is for this problem to find its own solution, because the massive European coal output appears to be forcing prices down. Besides, the Schuman proposal should, as is hoped in official circles, prevent such disagreements from breaking out in future.

This issue is particularly important not only because it has direct repercussions on the problem of the output and sales of iron and steel products, but also because France imports large quantities of coal from the Ruhr: 388 000 tonnes per month on average in 1948 (as opposed to 437 000 tonnes in 1938); 656 580 tonnes per month on average in 1949; 604 100 tonnes in January 1950, 553 900 tonnes in February and 586 600 tonnes in March. As deliveries from the Ruhr increased, those from the United States decreased accordingly (28 500 tonnes in January 1950 and none at all in February and March, as opposed to a monthly average of 747 100 tonnes in 1948). From the point of view of our general economy and of the balance of payments, the complete reversal of our major sources of supply is significant.

France and the Saar, and the latter in particular, also supply coal to West Germany under the exchange agreements: 3 400 000 tonnes in 1948 and 4 150 000 tonnes in 1949.

To conclude, we should point out that, contrary to a commonly aired opinion, and contrary to what was the case in the past, France supplies practically no iron ore to Germany. (We produced 2 532 000 tonnes of iron ore in February and 2 689 000 tonnes in January, as opposed to a monthly average of 2 755 000 tonnes in 1938.)

R. D.