

'France's mining industry wants to beat the competition from the Ruhr' from the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (10 February 1953)

Caption: On 10 February 1953, the German daily newspaper Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung reports on German fears about the common market in coal and steel.

Source: Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung. Die unabhängige Zeitung des Ruhrgebiets. Hrsg. Funke, Jakob ; R Herausgeber Brost, Erich. 10.02.1953, Nr. 34; 6. Jg. Essen: Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung GmbH. "Frankreichs Bergbau will sich gegen Konkurrenz der Ruhr behaupten", auteur: Weisenfeld, Ernst, p. 2.

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France's mining industry wants to beat the competition from the Ruhr

Before the Common Market — record production in 1952 — output increased by 40 %

On Tuesday, the Common Market of the European Coal and Steel Community will be opened. From that day on, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, with a total of 155 million inhabitants, will make up the joint production force for coal, iron ore and scrap metal in a single market. On Saturday, we outlined the purpose and aim of this market, paying particular attention to Germany's concerns and worries. Today, our Paris correspondent reports on the position taken by the French coal mining industry on the ECSC Common Market.

by our correspondent Dr Ernst Weisenfeld
PARIS, 9 February

The French coal mining industry is awaiting the launch of the ECSC Common Market without any 'exaggerated fear', declared the President of the (nationalised) French coal mining industry. French miners know that they will now have to compete with the Ruhr, a region more 'favoured by nature'.

During his statement, the President was standing in front of a chart depicting two trend lines, showing an increase in production from 47.2 million tonnes in 1947 to 57.5 million tonnes in 1952, thereby establishing a French mining record. This record was achieved despite the fact that the number of miners employed underground declined from 209 000 in 1930 to the current 165 000.

This upward trend is depicted even more clearly by the second curve. It shows that, compared to pre-war figures, output per shift in the French coal mining industry has increased by 40 % to 1 400 kg. This was accomplished by modernising the mining facilities in accordance with what is known as the 'Monnet Plan'.

This, however, is where the new troubles begin. Whilst experts in the Ruhr forecast a per shift output of 2 000 kg and anticipate an increase of up to more than 2 500 kg by 1961, such increases are impossible in France's main mining area (in northern France). Output per shift in this area currently stands at 1 250 kg.

The large-scale expansion of the Lorraine pits, where enormous seams have for a long time now made it possible to achieve a per shift output of over 2 000 kg, has significantly contributed to the increase in French coal production and per shift output. Lorraine coal, however, is of inferior quality compared to that from Lille or the Ruhr.

This is why the French coal mining industry wants to implement the following measures: concentration and closure of unprofitable mines in order to reduce the 98 currently existing pits to 73 by 1956. This rationalisation will have to be undertaken by the French coal mining industry single-handedly.

Coking problems

Another problem will have to be solved jointly with the state and the steel industry: the coking of Lorraine coal. The final hurdle before the implementation of the process transforming the French coal and steel industry will soon be overcome. It is expected that 2.7 million tonnes of coke for the steel industry can be mined in Lorraine in 1953. But even if the objective of 4 million tonnes is achieved by 1956, France will still need large quantities of Ruhr coke and coal.

This is why the French coal mining industry continually points to the problems of transport and is seeking the canalisation of the Moselle as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that the cost of transporting coal and coke to French steel works from the Ruhr becomes cheaper. The cost of canalising the Moselle is estimated at approximately DM 500 million. Two thirds of the route to be canalised lies on Federal territory. As this venture will mainly benefit France, Bonn is showing an understandable reluctance to pay up.

The demands submitted by the French coal mining industry to the Government mainly concern the keeping

of promises made when the Schuman Plan was ratified. They are asking for the implementation of the investment programme and a reduction in the coal mining industry debt. French figures show that debt incurred as a result of state loans for modernisation stands at 300 billion francs. This requires interest payments of 12 billion francs (approximately DM 150 million).

The varying price and wage trends since the initial negotiations relating to the Schuman Plan have also drastically affected the share of labour costs in West Germany and in France. The French coal mining industry is currently using every opportunity to point to its heavy social security payments. Taking these into account, the labour cost per tonne of coal in the French coal mining industry is 600 francs higher (i.e. nearly DM 7.50) than in the Ruhr. The tax burden is also higher in France. These figures are obviously very relative. The High Authority will therefore carry out a thorough analysis of the cost structures in both countries.

The French coal mining industry is currently concerned about its growing stock piles. Pithead stocks have increased in one year from 300 000 tonnes to 1.9 million tonnes. For that reason, a slump in the economy, however, is not feared.