

'The USA in the Ruhr' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (16 November 1948)

Caption: On 16 November 1948, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the consequences of dual US–British control over the German steel and coal industries of the Ruhr.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Joseph; Schwingenstein, August. 16.11.1948, Nr. 103; 4. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "USA im Ruhrgebiet", auteur:Kreyssig, Gerhard , p. 1.

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The USA in the Ruhr

Things are moving in the Ruhr. A military government law that came into force on 10 November is leading to a 'reorganisation' of the German coal-mining and iron-and-steel industries which are both concentrated in the Ruhr and form the heart of German industry. This heart is being controlled, because it must not beat too fast and should, for the time being, neither obey its own pulse nor be determined in its rhythm solely by the flow of its own blood. This heart – formerly Germany's arms foundry and as such a threat to Europe – now 'broken up' and 'demilitarised' (although only superficially 'denazified') – has now become one of the most important factors for the recovery of Europe, which will not be possible without the recovery of Germany.

Hitherto, its mines and ironworks were under the control of the British Commander-in-Chief, and one of the most important outcomes of the forthcoming reorganisation is the fact that America will from now on be based in the Ruhr – with the British remaining there alongside the Americans. This is more than the consequence of the fact that the British and American occupation zones have been united in a twin zone for nearly two years now and that the two military governments, via the Bi-zonal Control Office, have been partly supporting, partly encouraging, but also sometimes obstructing the Economic Council in Frankfurt in its efforts to advance the economic coordination of these two occupation zones in such a way as to turn the whole into a functional organism whose economy, shattered and destroyed by the aftermath of the war and the post-war period, would become again a real productive force.

The second point is the fact that the debate on one essential question for Germany's future – nationalisation – has again been postponed. If the military governments declare that the shortly to be implemented 'Trusteeship Plan' signified not only a technical and production-oriented reorganisation of the coal and iron-and-steel industries but also a reorganisation of the conditions of ownership conditions of those industries, then words have not been followed by deeds. As the question of nationalisation should be left to a representative, freely elected German Government (notwithstanding the question whether its territorial rights will cover all Germany or have to be restricted to West Germany), a debate on the core question of the whole problem has been postponed. We shall, as a matter of urgency, have to insist on emphasising that everything that is planned in the Ruhr is actually only a 'temporary' reorganisation for a 'transitional period' that will, please God, not last too long, if it remains true that the first freely elected representative government – let's say it openly: for West Germany – can actually take a sovereign decision. It will not be able to tackle this problem on its first day in office, but the question of the final conditions of ownership of the Ruhr's pits and mines will appear on the agenda when the first German Government is constituted and will remain there until this problem has been solved.

The third point is the reaffirmation of the old fact that the Ruhr is not just a geographically delineated industrial power centre of German origin but, at the same time, one of the most sensitive issues for European and even international politics. It would have been surprising if France had not lodged a protest, although the British and American military governments have declared that they had previously arranged the matter with their interested partners. Given the knee-jerk reactions inherent in politics, it was also to be expected that Poland would protest. We must, however, see a ray of hope for Europe in the fact that Holland (geographically closer to the Ruhr than Poland) has declared that it will not object. The ultimate solution in the Ruhr will also determine the fundamental issue whether Europe will, one day, be made up of genuine Europeans or simply of nations whose unity is merely a product of geography rather than of a true European attitude and common ties.

It is in this sense – I believe – that we should consider the Ruhr and then form our own point of view from which to observe carefully and critically what will happen. We know from long experience, especially under the Occupation, that no individual Germans, let alone 'Germany' as a whole, will become the owners of its vital industries if they are they are allowed to do no more than play the role of owners while in fact acting as mere 'trustees'. The trustee – as the first and foremost condition for proper operation – must not only know what he holds in trust but above all for whom he is holding it. It is precisely this question that has remained unanswered. We interpret this as a positive aspect, provided that it remains true that we Germans may actually answer this question ourselves.

The military governors must therefore be convinced that the development in the offing will be welcomed only with properly restrained feelings of satisfaction by the German people, although they will not be disappointed in the hope that the Germans will unreservedly cooperate in the implementation of these plans. We must realise, however, that 'unreserved cooperation' does not mean 'unreserved compliance', and unreserved cooperation must not be confused with unconditional approval. The Germans, together with the military governors, strongly hope that the temporary solution in the Ruhr will bring us closer to the objective of the reconstruction of the whole of Europe.

Gerhard Kreyszig