

'Ruhr–Lorraine union' from Die Welt (11 May 1950)

Caption: On 11 May 1950, the German daily newspaper Die Welt comments on the proposal made by Robert Schuman that coal and steel output in Western Europe should be pooled.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. BLEY, Curt ; Herausgeber SCHERER, Hans. 11.05.1950, n° 109; 5. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Union Ruhr-Lothringen", p. 2.

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Ruhr–Lorraine union

The unanimous decision of the French Cabinet on the pooling of the entire coal production of Germany, France and the Saar constitutes a huge breakthrough for the European idea. The ship of Europe had run aground. The idea of the European federation, as it is being represented in Strasbourg, found itself facing a crisis that had been created when the catchword Europe was replaced by a discussion of the real economic and political problems of international cooperation.

The crisis went so far that a number of European politicians regarded Strasbourg as a matter already settled, that at best might be capable of solving a few more cultural problems. The economic unity of Europe was directed from the Marshall Plan office in Paris, and security questions were at all events left to the Atlantic Alliance.

This actual weakness was compounded by psychological momentum. France's need for security seemed not to have been satisfied by Strasbourg. It was as if France felt somewhat abandoned on its own with Germany in Strasbourg, given the fact that, because of its sea-borne imperial interests, Britain was not giving its all to Europe.

Although the main forces of the French political centre had emerged in the past few years as a standard bearer for the idea of a 'third power', namely Europe, which would mean that the old continent was to be an influential mediator between Washington and Moscow, this might create the impression that France had capitulated in the face of the problems and difficulties involved in such a grand solution. In addition to this, European unity requires time. Soviet imperialism in the world, however, did not allow for any more time. The non-Communist world had to devise a clear strategy of Cold War if peace was not to be jeopardised. The London Conference of Foreign Ministers will try to find a solution to this problem.

However, in the interim, Prime Minister Bidault had set out his demand for the establishment of an Atlantic Peace Council. Also in the interim, France had seemed to distance itself from the hope of an independent European solution and to see Europe now only as part of the Atlantic Pact. Strasbourg would have been torpedoed by this, and the question would have arisen as to what sense there would still have been in Germany becoming a member of the Council of Europe.

The sensational declaration of the French Government concerning the creation of a union stretching from the Ruhr to Lorraine creates a new situation. The great continental solution is in the forefront once again. And once again the hope is born that the European federation as a guarantee of world peace might become a reality.

On behalf of the SPD, Dr Schumacher has pointed out the danger that a merger of industry does not constitute genuine European unification of the nations but leads only to a 'Europe Co. Ltd.' The core of this accusation should not be taken lightly. The history of the Weimar Republic allows us to draw the conclusion that the Franco-German cartels of that era sounded the death knell for the political aspirations of Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand. Such endeavours were abandoned in the face of the political realities, and the focus of concentration was the economic fate of Europe.

Times have changed, however. Twenty years have passed. Another world war, another wave of destruction and another attempt at reconstruction have not gone by without leaving their mark on the significance of international economic agreements. For some considerable time now, the Americans in the Marshall Plan office in Paris have been urging the economic unification of Europe. The work done in Paris has still not led to any success, because the phase of supporting national economies in Europe has not yet been overcome. Strasbourg, too, was powerless to create economic unity, because the Council of Europe originally possessed no economic powers and responsibilities at all and, later on, was left only with those that were in dispute.

In this situation, economic cooperation does not mean putting on the brakes, it is a positive contribution to the political unity of Europe, all the more so, since the intention is not to create a cartel of heavy industry,

but a 'High Authority' at governmental level. However, as a prerequisite, it is necessary to meet the demand of the German unions that the Schuman proposal will have no detrimental effect on the regulation of ownership status or on workers' co-determination.

Strasbourg, however, was given a further boost by the economic union, and the decision of the Federal German Cabinet to seek accession to the Council of Europe thus receives impressive moral justification.

The decision of the French Cabinet comes at an opportune moment. It is a constructive part of the global plan for cooperation between all non-Communist states. It is being proposed for debate at a time when Bonn is required to take a decision on the accession of Germany to the Council of Europe. This means that the decision of conscience for the Federal Chancellor and German MPs is made easier. The unfortunate Saar question can be defused during the new talks on the union.

At the same time the French proposal constitutes a major contribution to peace. The more inner strength Europe gains, the greater is the guarantee for the avoidance of a third world war. The fact that Germany is taking part not in a military security system but in a process of European economic reorganisation healing should mean that the approval of the Paris proposal does not constitute any risk to all the efforts directed at abolishing the division of Germany. The close economic cooperation which is now being sought on the basis of equality between Germany and France has already been in existence for a long time between Russia and the Eastern Zone on the basis of colonial exploitation.

The strongest impression of the proposal for the union, however, is based on the fact that Europe is still strong enough to implement grand and powerful ideas, constructive plans, and imaginative visions. The efforts to ward off Communism cannot be based on ideas of protection, of the defensive, or of restraint alone. The intellectual and political survival of the West and of the non-Communist world can succeed only with positive ideas.