

## The importance of coal for the French economy

**Caption:** Anonymous note on the consumption and prospects for the production of coal in Europe and in France at the end of the Second World War.

**Source:** Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, [s.l.]. Archives Jean Monnet. Fonds AME. 57/1/98.

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## The importance of coal for the French economy

I. Before the war, France consumed on average:

6 million tonnes per month

It produced 4 million tonnes per month.

It imported 2 million tonnes per month  
equal to 33 % of its total consumption.

II. After the Liberation, national output fell to 1 500 000 tonnes, owing to serious difficulties that hampered work in the mines. The causes were:

(a) a drop in the labour force to 70 % of pre-war levels

(b) a fall in productivity per worker because of:

machinery shortages

lack of supplies

clothing shortages

(c) delayed Liberation and the destruction of mines in the Moselle region.

A major effort was made to step up national output, and the following figures were achieved:

October 1944 1 600 000 tonnes

February 1945 2 500 000 tonnes

September 1945 3 100 000 tonnes

These results were attained thanks to a sustained effort in all areas that increased both the number of miners and productivity per miner.

With that in mind:

(a) French miners who had been mobilised or deported were put back to work, and German prisoners were gradually assigned to mining. Today, 42 000 German prisoners are working in the mines, and the labour force has returned to 95 % of pre-war levels.

(b) Productivity per miner has been maintained despite the shortage in equipment and the employment of new, less-productive workers who produce 900 kg per day instead of the 1 300 kg per day recorded in 1938.

Improving miners' conditions has been a top priority. Special attention has been paid to work clothes, meals, ration supplements and housing. Cabins that had housed refugees from the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais areas have been allocated to German prisoners working in the mines.

III. Output compared with the pre-war situation

In the space of one year, French output has increased to 75 % of pre-war levels, and France is now by far the biggest producer in all continental Europe. Other leading areas have reached the following percentages of pre-war output levels:

Belgium 52 %

Netherlands 40 %

Saarland 30 %

Ruhr 25 %

Great Britain is at only 80 % of its pre-war output figures.

IV. Imports

These efforts notwithstanding, available coal from national output meets only 50 % of needs. In addition, France supplies Allied troops with 250 000 to 300 000 tonnes of coal per month, once the fixed amount of coal needed by the mines has been deducted. That is why we need to import more coal now than before the war.

Sources of imported coal:

### The United States

The US Administration decided that it would send France 500 000 tonnes of coal per month starting in August, of which 200 000 will go to repay the 1 400 000 tonnes supplied by France to US troops since the Liberation and 300 000 tonnes to meet the needs of troops and for redeployment purposes.

### Germany

The only way to overcome the short supply in France and other European countries is to step up coal output in the Ruhr and Saarland.

With that in mind, President Truman and General de Gaulle instructed the heads of occupation zones to give top priority to German coal output. In a joint directive, they set the following targets:

Attain sufficient output to allow exports to a number of countries:

10 million tonnes by 31 December;

15 million tonnes between 1 January and 30 April 1945.

However, these targets have not been reached. Instead of 10 million tonnes, coal extracted to date and forecast output until the end of 1945 will add up to less than 5 million tonnes during the second half of the year, of which 1 900 000 tonnes will be set aside for France. Unless operating methods are changed, the same will occur in 1946.

Coal output in Germany can be increased at the desired pace only if resources in the various occupation zones are pooled. These resources include equipment in the British Zone, pit timber and supplies in the American Zone, the rational distribution of the labour force and means of transport. To achieve that, a planning and coordinating committee with sufficient authority must be created without delay to oversee German mining.

### V. The consequences for France

The minimum requirements for France in 1946 are 5 million tonnes per month, or at least 60 million tonnes for the entire year.

The share of French-mined coal made available to the French economy will not exceed 3 000 000 and, later, 3 500 000 tonnes per month, amounting to 38 000 000 tonnes for the year.

At the current rate, France will receive from the Ruhr no more than 12 to 15 000 000 tonnes in 1946. If output is increased to the levels required by the Truman–Attlee–de Gaulle directive, then deliveries to France will be between 20 and 25 000 000 tonnes.

If these amounts are not met, France will have to import finished and semi-finished products, which will cost between \$500 and 700 million in 1946. If that happens, our currency reserves and credit will be uselessly depleted, and our trade deficit will increase.

The rational mining of German coal is the only way to revitalise Western Europe's war-torn economy, and that of France as well, which has always been one of the biggest importers of German coal.