

'The Schuman Plan' from the Luxemburger Wort (20 June 1950)


Caption: On 20 June 1950, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort considers the importance of pooling the coal and steel output of the Benelux countries, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and Italy from a European perspective.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 20.06.1950, n° 171; 103e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Der Schuman-Plan", p. 1.

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The Schuman Plan

This Plan is as bold as it is realistic. It developed in the mind of a determined politician who, as a native of Lorraine, experienced the turmoil and aftermath of the wars between France and Germany even more directly than others. After the third conflict between them that his generation has been through, it is not entirely by chance that he became France's Foreign Minister.

At first glance, his Plan is an economic one. Its ultimate aim, however, is political. It is not the first time in history that economic reform has paved the way for political upheaval. It is not based on any annexations, however, but on free political understanding on a wider, European footing. Robert Schuman is right not to want to create a united Europe in the sense of the Strasbourg Council of Europe until a Franco–German agreement has been reached. After all, what is the Europe of this famous Council, when you look at it on a map? What is it without the Soviet Union, without the people's democracies? Just half of what it was! And what would it be without Germany? Just a forecourt of a Europe, a springboard between East and West, a servant to be hired by one of two masters! Germany and France alone, as masters in the free Europe, already constitute its spine, its head and its lungs. Franco–German agreement on the coal and steel industry and the plan to fuse the iron and coal industry — these are the rib from which Schuman wants to create the new European.

Schuman sees the settlement of economic conflict and the international control of heavy industry as prerequisites for the creation of a super-European authority, but an authority that does not mean that individual countries would have to relinquish control over their internal political systems or come in line with others. Schuman is taking a step that Strasbourg would have liked to take, but discussion of such a step in a plenary meeting would have seen the disintegration of the Council, along with the European idea itself. The Labour Party would not have reacted any differently in Strasbourg than they did when the Schuman Plan was announced in London, but the situation would have developed differently in that the French Socialists, along with their British counterparts, would have shown the Plan the cold shoulder and would not have seized the opportunity, as they did, to declare their support for the European idea and the foundation of a super-European authority. They would not, in keeping with the saying 'noblesse oblige', have brought the Labour representatives to their senses at the conference in London.

The British Labour Party's manifesto, which is a rejection of European unity, could be explained away and forgiven bearing in mind its overriding concern with Great Britain and the Commonwealth, were it not for the fact that it contains the ominous statement that a coal and steel pool, and, by extension, European unity, would only be possible between Socialist countries. This candour means that the comforting words of our Socialists, who say that Britain is realistic and not building castles in the sky, are meaningless. Britain, at least as far as its Government is concerned, is Socialist, and what the Labour Party fears most of all is that union on several levels with those countries in Europe which do not have a Socialist majority would accelerate the process of Labour's decline, especially because Attlee and Morrison's regime has been seriously weakened, at the heart of the Commonwealth, in Australia and New Zealand. At the moment, these countries are as far from Labour's Socialism and Britain as the Continent is from the White Cliffs of Dover.

The fusion of the European coal and steel industry, as planned by Schuman, puts all the countries involved in a position where there are nothing but advantages to be gained from it, without their having to agree from the outset that European political unity would follow a coal and steel pool or that a supranational European Government would follow the Pool Authority.

In the short term, the pooling of primary industries can only be beneficial, because market regulation in this area, with the aim of full employment, of increasing production and consumption, in other words of raising the living standards of the working masses, means nothing less than the ideal solution dreamt of for decades by the trade unions. As has been emphasised, the British need have no fear that the living standards of its workforce would be lowered if this pool were to come into being. One has the distinct impression that it is the very opposite that Labour fears from this project. Is the end of a dual-pricing policy, which the Schuman Plan also envisages, not welcome for the reorganisation of the steel market?

We in Luxembourg know better than anyone what a negative effect this practice has had on sales in our major industries in recent times. It is in all our interests to ensure that this state of affairs does not continue and that living standards of workers in other iron-producing European countries are raised. Moreover, at the Conference of European Socialists, which ended in London on Sunday, a resolution was tabled which included the demand, entirely in keeping with Schuman's ideas, that, in order to raise living standards in Europe's primary industries, the standard that progressive European countries have reached should be made the norm. A small question to our Socialists — who exactly do you mean when talking about the standard reached by progressive countries? Please explain! If that is too hard, then a quiet word about Mrs Perle Mesta's statement before leaving New York will do.

Schuman's coal and steel pool is fundamentally different from the steel ententes of the past. It is not a private, but a state matter. Why the Socialists are against it, and why the Labour Government disapproves of the planned Coal and Steel Authority but proposes a committee of government representatives whose decisions will be binding only if they are adopted unanimously, remains a mystery.

It would mean that the ominous principle of the veto had been transferred to the field of European cooperation. It would be the triumph of the Soviets. The work of the coal and steel pool would be just as illusory as that of the Security Council.