

'You cannot pay lip service to Europe but be against the pool' from Il Giornale d'Italia (13 June 1950)

Caption: On 13 June 1950, the Italian daily newspaper Il Giornale d'Italia considers the difficulties to be overcome for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

Source: Il Giornale d'Italia. 13.06.1950. [s.l.]. "Non si può parlar d'Europa ed esser contro il Pool",
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You cannot pay lip service to Europe but be against the pool

The British counter-proposal virtually renders the union ineffective

From our correspondent

Paris, 12 June. — French government circles are seen to be somewhat concerned about how the industrial sector will react to the Schuman Plan when it is invited to give its views. A wave of vigorous opposition is also expected in Parliament once it has to ratify the agreements on the pool between France and the other participating countries.

The existence of a current of opinion hostile to the Government's project is undeniable. This demonstrates not just justifiable apprehension, but also that public opinion — not only in France but in other western countries as well — is not yet ready to accept the 'European' ideal or to sacrifice national economic considerations for its sake.

Too many people glibly proclaim themselves good 'Europeans' but, when the time comes to accept the risks and the consequences of this principle, they start to equivocate and treat the smallest sacrifice as intolerable.

The time, however, has now come for governments, for those involved in the steel industry and for nations themselves to furnish decisive proof of whether or not they want Europe. To put it in a nutshell, if one believes in Europe, one must accept the Schuman Plan, the first and truly revolutionary attempt to move from words to action. One can, of course, be against the Schuman Plan, but in that case one must be frank enough to stop talking about 'Europe'.

The British are being consistent because, by opposing as they do (albeit with astute reservations and precautions) this collective partnership of European iron and steel industries, they are holding firm to their policy, which is anti-European. So the reactions of surprise and indignation to the Labour Government's refusal to assume any commitment to the Schuman Plan are out of place.

Some people in Paris have made the point that there has not been adequate groundwork for the French plan, nor has it been backed by clarification that might have dissipated the justifiable concerns to which I have referred.

In fact, the French Foreign Ministry has not provided the governments invited to take part in the negotiations that are due to open on 20 June with any written text outlining the project. It has remained deliberately vague because — as the diplomats were told when they asked for something concrete to present to their governments — they want to allow maximum freedom of discussion for the countries that have accepted the principle of the pool and are to take part in the negotiations.

The intention is laudable, but one cannot help arguing that the existence of a document setting out the basis for discussion would not have curbed the freedom of discussion.

This omission has give the British an excuse to keep their distance, while at the same time occupying the moral high ground of one who says 'before committing myself I want to know exactly what I'm getting into'. And then there is the French Government, which has said on several occasions that taking part in the negotiations means commitment to nothing more than acceptance of the principle of the pool.

The French omission has also helped to create ambiguities, from which the British have been swift to profit. For instance, the misunderstanding about the pool being a cartel, which is a gross error: cartels are syndicates of industrialists formed to guarantee maximum price levels, whereas here we are dealing with understandings between governments in order to guarantee a minimum price level.

Other misunderstandings have arisen about the nature of the supranational authority whose task it will be to control iron and steel in the participating countries. Here too the British have been able to profit from the

situation in order to confuse the issues and put forward their own proposition, substituting this authority with a 'national' committee. This is nonsense, given the 'European' spirit of the Schuman project, which implies the waiver of elements of sovereignty. The authority, in fact, has unlimited powers in all the economic territory included in the pool. It can, for instance, order the closure of French mines on the grounds that it costs more to extract coal there than in the Ruhr. It can dictate the limitation or abolition of production in certain areas even where it is judged vital to defence or the national economy. In short, it can adopt any measure it thinks fit for the rationalisation of the European iron and steel industry, and so on.

The British counter-proposal, on the other hand, rules out this supranational aspect of the controlling body, which means that it is in contradiction with the very principle on which the Schuman project is founded, depriving it of its most salient feature.

At present, it is impossible to predict the outcome of the Schuman proposal for the following reasons: (1) we shall have to see (in the course of the imminent negotiations) what it effectively consists of; (2) we shall have to wait until every country taking part in the negotiations has made a careful examination of the actual potential offered by their own coal and steel industries in order to judge whether joining the pool will be a catastrophe for their national economy or, in a situation where they only make losses, whether these might be compensated by other advantages.

It is obvious that no one is calling for heroic sacrifices in the name of the European ideal. Reasonable and tolerable sacrifices are sought only when it is certain that their result will be the well-being of all.

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