

'The fundamental problem' from the Corriere della Sera (31 August 1954)

Caption: On 31 August 1954, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) and deplores the French National Assembly's decision.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 31.10.1954, n° 207; anno 79. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Il problema fondamentale", auteur: Guerriero, Augusto, p. 1.

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The fundamental problem

The French National Assembly has buried the EDC. The French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès France, killed it in Brussels; from that moment on, his main concern has been to set the terms of the debate, pointing it in such a direction that the EDC should be buried and the Government remain intact. That is the reason for his neutrality. A year ago, when standing as prime ministerial candidate, he himself had declared that it was inconceivable for a Head of Government not to take a stand in this debate. But the debate has arrived, and Mendès France has not taken a stand: the man whose own motto is *Il faut choisir* — ‘One must choose’ — has not made a choice on a question of such capital importance as the success or failure of the EDC.

All the same, what has happened would not be such a disaster — it could, on the contrary, even be seen as a clarification — were France now determined to cooperate fully in achieving the alternative solution of a military defence coalition. The EDC’s objective had been to solve two problems: the defence of Western Europe, in which Germany too would have been invited to participate, and European ‘integration’, involving the limitation of national sovereignties in favour of a supranational organisation. And the superimposition of this more self-evident, ambitious objective has prevented the implementation of the former more modest, practical goal.

The Brussels Conference proved that the second problem was, for the time being, insoluble. The French National Assembly vote is a blow to this part of the enterprise — the attempt to achieve ‘integration’ — but not to the attempt at an alliance with Germany. Many of the EDC’s adversaries have denied again and again that they intended to rule out German rearmament. And Mendès France has, in the last few days, repeatedly made clear that, if the EDC were to be rejected, German rearmament would have to be accepted.

But does he accept it himself? In one of his weekly radio addresses he confronted the French nation categorically with the dilemma: ‘You must choose between German rearmament controlled by the EDC and German rearmament that you can no longer control in any way.’ Stating the question in such terms would also cause the second solution to fail, for the French people would never accept totally uncontrolled German rearmament. German rearmament within the framework of an alliance and under the control of the bodies and command structure of an alliance would, however, be conceivable.

It all depends on the sincerity of Mendès France’s intentions. Randolfo Pacciardi, Member of the Italian Parliament, says that, from his personal knowledge of the man, he would not say that Mendès France is ‘the kind of person who plays a double game’ and that ‘if he claims to have made no commitments on European questions, one has to believe him.’ But he also recognises that Mr Mendès France’s policy has, so far, benefited only Russia. We have never met Mendès France, but it is nonetheless a serious matter that the question should have been raised. The fact remains that, when Sir Gladwin Jebb asked him if he had entered into commitments regarding Europe, he evaded the question. Another fact is that he flew straight from Brussels to London to make proposals to the British Government that have so far remained a mystery. And it is also true that, despite his declared neutrality, he manoeuvred the Assembly debate in such a way as to bury the EDC.

If the Bonn conventions are ratified, Germany will regain its sovereignty, but not as far as arms are concerned. The fundamental problem — Germany’s participation in the defence of Europe — will therefore remain unsolved. According to an authoritative English newspaper, if France were to emerge from this troubled period opposing any method of attaining this objective, then the crisis would indeed be serious and fundamental, not just for France but for the whole Western world.

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