

Message for Monsieur Schuman from Mr Bevin

Caption: In this message to his French counterpart, Robert Schuman, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin, proposes reconsidering the Allies' dismantling policy in the occupied zones.

Source: BEYER, Henry. Robert Schuman, L'Europe par la réconciliation franco-allemande. Lausanne: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, Centre de recherches européennes, 1986. 171 p. (Cahiers rouges). p. 82-84.

Copyright: (c) Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe et Centre de recherches européennes, Lausanne

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/message_for_monsieur_schuman_from_mr_bevin-en-0fc42bca-95ef-4f07-bf54-2c23d3e015a2.html

Last updated: 03/07/2015

Message for Monsieur Schuman from Mr Bevin (30th October)

I have been giving careful consideration to the present situation in Germany. I have come to the conclusion that this has now become so serious primarily as the result of our dismantling policy, that I must send you and Mr. Acheson my views without further delay.

2. It is clear that for several reasons the moral authority of the High Commission and of the Allies in Germany is being rapidly destroyed. The principal cause of this is the present dismantling programme, which is arousing bitter resentment and opposition in Germany, particularly in the British Zone, where most of the dismantling is taking place. I must tell you frankly that the continuation of dismantling is causing great disquiet among the Labour Party here and is becoming more and more unpopular in Parliament. The fall in prestige of the Allies is also due to the fact that our joint policy in Germany has not been properly coordinated and proclaimed. On the contrary publicity has been given to the views of one High Commissioner which are not in accordance with the policy of our governments. This already serious situation has been aggravated by increasing pressure on the contractors and dismantling labour force both by the German authorities and public opinion. The consequence is that the German operators are becoming demoralised and it is only a matter of a few weeks before dismantling collapses for lack of labour. In my view we cannot afford to wait until our whole dismantling policy falls about our ears, and the Western Powers are publicly humiliated in front of the Germans. We have got to face and deal with this situation.

3. The present position is that Dr. Adenauer is intending shortly to present to the High Commission in response to an invitation which he received from them his proposals as to the future of dismantling. I think it is likely that some of his proposals will be unacceptable to us, but that on some of them there will be scope for further discussion and negotiation. As I see it we should seize this last opportunity of grappling with the problem from a position of relative strength. Unless we do so, we shall suddenly find that dismantling has in fact ceased and that we no longer enjoy any freedom of choice.

4. I therefore suggest for your very urgent consideration that as soon as Dr. Adenauer's proposals are received, the High Commission should be authorised to work out an acceptable solution. These discussions will necessarily take some time. Meanwhile, unless we take action to prevent it, the general tension will mount and collapse of dismantling will occur. I do not suggest that all dismantling should be suspended on this account during the discussions, but I do think that it will be necessary to authorise the High Commissioners to tell Dr. Adenauer that although the dismantling programme will proceed while the discussions are going on, they are prepared, in order not to prejudice the final position, to suspend dismantling on a named list of plants. These plants should be those the dismantling of which will in any case require a long time to complete.

5. The High Commissioners should also make it absolutely clear to Dr. Adenauer that there is no question of suspending or revising our plans for the dismantling of war plants or for carrying out our programme of disarmament and demilitarisation in other fields. We are not prepared to make any change where our essential security requirements are involved.

6. An agreement on dismantling which would include the suspension of work at a number of long-term plants, would represent a considerable achievement for Dr. Adenauer's Government, which we are all anxious should maintain and increase its prestige and authority throughout Germany. If, however, we are to avoid during the coming period a constant series of differences and disputes with the German Federal Government which can only retard the fulfilment of our policy of associating Germany closely with the Western world, I suggest that we should be wise in our own interests to try to reach an understanding with Dr. Adenauer on a programme for dealing with as many as possible of the more important problems which are likely to cause trouble in the course of the period before the time comes to consider a revision of the Occupation Statute.

7. On some of these problems we are anxious that the Federal Government should take or refrain from certain action and on others the Federal Government is anxious to obtain some concessions from us. I feel sure that it would be of great advantage to our three governments if we could reach agreement in principle

soon on our joint attitude towards the Federal Government in respect of these questions. It would be an even greater advantage and would be a great step towards the achievement of stability in Western Europe and the close association on a proper basis of Germany with the West which we all desire to see fulfilled, if agreement on our policy as regards all these problems among our three governments could be translated into a general understanding with the German Federal Government.

8. The sort of problems which I have in mind are the participation of the Federal Government in the international control of the Ruhr; the acceptance by the German Federal Government of the Military Security Board and other essential security measures; a clear understanding with the Federal Government on the scope and operation of the Occupation Statute until the time comes for its review; and the problems involved in the continuance of the present legal state of war with Germany. I do not suggest that this list is exhaustive and on some of the matters there may not be sufficient ground at present for an understanding to be reached. I put them forward however for your consideration.

9. I hope from what I have said that you will agree with me that it is greatly in the interests of our three governments that we should review very urgently the present situation in Germany with special reference to the problems which I have just mentioned. I myself feel that the position is so serious particularly in view of the dismantling programme that I should like to have a full discussion very soon. I therefore suggest that the opportunity should be taken of the forthcoming meetings in Paris for our three governments to have a full review of the German situation and of our policy there, and I would propose that we should devote a day to this, immediately after the meetings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Consultative Council of the Brussels Treaty Powers have been concluded. I feel sure that an informal and frank discussion on the lines of our successful meeting in Washington last spring would have very valuable results and I suggest that it would be wise to ask our three High Commissioners to attend in order to give us the latest information and their views on the present situation.