

Statement by Hervé Alphand (11 November 1948)

Caption: On 11 November 1948, the Head of the French delegation at the London Conference, Hervé Alphand, expresses concern at the repercussions of Law 75 on the regulation and management of the distribution of the Ruhr's coal, coke and steel.

Source: Archives Nationales du Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Deuxième guerre mondiale. Deuxième guerre mondiale - Autorité internationale de la Ruhr. Conférence pour l'établissement de l'A.I.R. - 1948, AE 8111.

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(Unofficial Translation)

On the occasion of the opening of these conversations, at which a detailed agreement is to be drawn up for the creation of an international Authority for the Ruhr, the French Delegation, on the instructions of its Government, is obliged to make a preliminary statement: –

On the 18th June, 1948, when the French Government informed the Governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg that it accepted the recommendations of the London Conference on Germany, which form the basis of our present discussions, it drew the attention of those Governments to certain reservations which reflected the unchanging position of the French Delegation and which were the result of a resolution of the French National Assembly:

These reservations referred to two principal points: –

(1) The French Government declared that the question of the ownership of the mines and basic industries of the Ruhr ought to be settled as soon as possible. It emphasised that it had not yet been possible to reconcile the views of the various Allied Governments on this question. It expressed the hope that agreement would be reached without difficulty on the principle of the expropriation of the former magnates. For the remainder, it considered, as always, that the establishment of international ownership would be the best solution from every point of view.

(2) Similarly, the French Government declared that when the occasion arose to take steps on the setting up of the International Authority for the Ruhr, it would wish to reopen the question of the international control of management of the mines.

The Anglo-American Bizonal Authorities have yesterday, 10th November, published a law of which the preamble includes a declaration under the terms of which it would be for a freely elected German Government to determine the final settlement of the ownership of the coal and steel industries. Although this declaration is in accordance with the position previously taken up by the American and British Governments and is accompanied by a reservation making it clear that the former magnates and Nazi owners can, under no circumstances, be restored to their properties, it cannot be accepted by the French Government.

My Government indicated yesterday that it would not recognise this declaration nor any other which might be made by the American and British Military Governors concerning the final disposal of the mining and metallurgical properties of the Ruhr as long as no agreement had been reached among the Governments of the interested Powers on the question of eventual ownership. The settlement of the problem, which is considered to be of paramount importance, is not a matter for the British and American Commanders-in-Chief but for Governments only.

Although the question of ownership is not on the agenda of these discussions and is being dealt with at present through the normal diplomatic channel, my Government has instructed me to restate its position in this matter in such a way that it is made quite clear that our participation in this conference changes in no way the views which it previously expressed on this point.

On the other hand, so far as the control of management is concerned, the French Government hopes, as we said on the 18th June, that this question can be reopened during the present discussions.

Examination of the text drawn up in May insofar as it concerns the International Authority of the Ruhr has confirmed the fears already expressed by the French Government that the control of distribution of the coal, coke and steel of the Ruhr cannot be properly effective if the International Authority does not retain a certain number of the powers of control over the management of plants now exercised by the Allied Authorities. I must emphasise once more that we do not wish that management itself should be vested in the International Authority but that this organisation should receive sufficient powers to supervise in particular the drawing up and implementation of programmes of production and re-equipment.

It is understood that the new and limited powers which would thus be given to the Authority would be exercised in conformity with the needs of economic reconstruction in Europe, including Germany.

That is the declaration which I was charged to make in the name of the French Government, which acts on a formal mandate of its Parliament.