

Dirk Stikker, Men of Responsibility

Caption: In his memoirs, Dirk Stikker, Netherlands Foreign Minister from 1948 to 1952, recalls the reaction in the Netherlands to the declaration made by Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950.

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It was Robert Schuman, however, who in May, 1950, took the first public and important step towards resolving the latent conflict with Germany and setting Western Europe on the path to economic integration. Schuman was a man of true goodness of spirit. Never married, gentle in manner, he lived very simply. Scholarly yet practical, he combined intellectual pursuits (his collection of autographs was one of the finest in Europe) with political sagacity, figuring as a major influence in all French Governments from 1946 to 1952. He often seemed to me to be the embodiment of the ideals of the Christian democracy in which he believed. He was very French in his thought — lucid, slyly humorous and traditional, but of a French tradition stemming more from Henry of Navarre, to whom Churchill referred in his speech at The Hague, than from Louis XIV. He certainly revered France as the eldest daughter of the Church, but his Catholic vision of Europe included a France leading rather than dominating. So long as he guided French foreign policy, both France and Europe benefited.

As I recall, Schuman, together with Jean Monnet, first spoke at the end of April about pooling the Western European coal and steel industries, following a lunch at the Luxemburg Embassy in London at which several ministers were present. The main purpose of Schuman's proposal was to put French and German coal and steel production under a supranational authority. He invited other countries to join in the operation, which was aimed at rendering war between France and Germany forever impossible. Naturally, there were also economic reasons for this new venture. Whatever its origins, the surrender of sovereignty and the creation of some kind of a federal authority were clearly steps towards the unification of Europe.

I was in favor. I needed, however, some reassurance as to the extent of the powers of the new Authority. The basis of the Dutch economy at that time was full employment, a relatively high purchasing power for the guilder, and in connection with that, low prices and relatively low wages. I therefore asked Schuman, "Do you believe that this Authority, which is to act in a relatively restricted field, can in any way interfere in the national economies so far as general prices and social conditions are concerned?" When Schuman replied that this would not be the case I promised him full support in the negotiations.

The principle of relinquishing a part of sovereignty, as embodied in the Schuman Plan for the European Coal and Steel Community, was not entirely new. The proposals for the EPU which were being discussed at the same time provided that the managing board of the EPU would be able to take decisions by simple majority.

I was then personally grappling with the same questions implied in the Schuman Plan, and spoke on this very issue before the Trade Union Advisory Committee, the organization created by all the free Western trade unions for cooperation with the European Recovery Program and OEEC, when it met in Rome on April 18, 1950:

If we really wish to develop our European cooperation, we shall have voluntarily to relinquish some of our cherished sovereign rights and accept the possibility that decisions can be made on matters of common interest with less than unanimity. ... [We needed] a new series of political devices to bring our respective governmental systems into harmony with the great technical unification of Europe which is taking place.

Whether the system of a high authority was the best device was a problem on which I had some doubts. I feared that it might frighten the Labor Government of the United Kingdom. I was then working on a paper to stimulate integration in a different way. My premise was that integration should cover more sectors than just coal and steel, and I hoped to devise an organization which would be acceptable to more countries.

Having obtained the agreement of the Dutch Cabinet, I introduced my paper in OEEC on June 10, 1950. At the same time Pella of Italy and Petsche of France presented their own plans. Integration became the source

of great activity. Price gives a brief and fair description of these three plans:

The Stikker plan called for an industry-by-industry approach comparable to that of the Schuman Plan, in which liberalization measures would be applied in turn to one segment of the European economy after another aided by the establishment and use of a European integration fund which would give assistance to Governments for the modernization of industries adversely affected by liberalization measures or for new investments in unrestricted industries. The Pella plan placed emphasis upon a preferential reduction of tariffs among OEEC member countries. The Petsche plan called for the establishment of a European investment bank to finance the modernization of industries and for investment projects involving concentration and specialization of industries under the most suitable conditions; the more general purpose of this fund would be to assist in financing projects whose production would yield a commercial return in an unrestricted European market and would become, as rapidly as possible, competitive in world markets. As a permanent institution, the bank would lend to private and state enterprises as well as to governments and would require the participation of private capital in all projects assisted.

In my proposal the European Integration Fund was to advise the Council of OEEC, as the central organization, which would take decisions by a three-fourths majority. A particularly vital concept, to which I had occasion years later to turn for the solution of similar problems, was that if one or more countries did not wish to cooperate, the others could go ahead.

When all these plans came before the Council on July 7, 1950, Sir Stafford Cripps embarked on a lengthy and, as it was to prove, highly significant statement. Cripps took the line that the United Kingdom could not integrate its economy in any manner that would prejudice the full discharge of its responsibilities in the sterling area and the Commonwealth. He added, however, that at the same time the United Kingdom regarded itself as bound up with Western Europe, not only in economic terms, and in political and strategic interest, but in cultural traditions and in participation in the heritage of Christian civilization.

In the OEEC, Cripps said, the policy of the United Kingdom rested and would continue to rest on the Convention for European Economic Cooperation by which all members of the Organization were bound. His delegation was ready to examine sympathetically any scheme which involved a closer association with groups of national governments of all member countries, provided that such association was consistent with the policy he had outlined.

He emphasized that in the field of trade, the interests of the United Kingdom were, of course, worldwide, like those of other countries. Furthermore, the United Kingdom was a member of three interlocking groups — the Commonwealth, the North Atlantic Tripartite group and Western Europe. It could not, therefore, undertake a policy in Western Europe which would run counter to its trade interests and to the responsibilities arising from its membership in the other two groups.

Cripps stated that, as we knew, the United Kingdom had not rejected in principle the scheme for the integration of the coal and steel industries of Europe, provided that some satisfactory scheme could be worked out, but he added that his delegation had emphasized on numerous occasions, as he noted Mr. Pella seemed to have recognized, the need in matters of this kind to consult with GATT or the ITO, or other world organizations with which many members of the OEEC were associated. Sir Stafford said that he hardly needed to emphasize how necessary such negotiations were in matters of tariffs. If we were anxious to bridge the dollar gap, one of the chief objects was to cut down tariffs on the other side of the Atlantic, as well as on this side, and that was a problem dealt with by GATT or ITO. He noted that in my own remarks to the Council, I had also recognized the necessity of not making the narrower European cooperation any brake upon the wider world cooperation. That was a danger, he thought, against which we must guard very carefully.

However lengthy this enunciation of British policy was, its purport was unmistakable. Britain would go no further in the steps towards European integration. The policy bore the stamp of Cripps himself. Although he had been until then fully cooperative, and had even taken important initiatives for the liberalization of trade and the creation of the EPU, it was plain that in Cripps' thinking there was a definite limit to Britain's economic cooperation with the Continent. For Cripps was not speaking as a mere messenger of London. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was the dominant influence in British economic policy. (At the time Gaitskell was serving under him, and Harold Wilson was President of the Board of Trade.) Austere and brilliant, Cripps, totally absorbed in work and ideas, was the Socialist intellectual *par excellence*. Cold logic dominated his every move. In this case, I believe Socialist doctrine played a considerable role, and I suspect that Cripps figured both that the British Commonwealth had first priority as a fertile field for socialist development, and that the Europe which was being created would not be, in any case, a Socialist Europe. If my surmise as to Cripps' thinking is correct, this was not the first, nor the last, time that the political right and left were to find themselves occupying the same position. For although the motives of Cripps' rebuff to Europe could not be confused with those of the imperial preference school of thought exemplified by Lord Beaverbrook, the results were identical. With Cripps' statement, we fetched up on the rock on which all later plans for European unification were to be stranded — until the Macmillan Government finally changed British policy, only to be rejected in 1963 by the French veto.

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