

‘Our coal mines under threat’ from Le Drapeau Rouge (5 February 1951)

Caption: On 5 February 1951, in the Belgian Communist daily newspaper Le Drapeau Rouge, Pierre Joye expresses his concerns at the economic and social consequences of the Schuman Plan for Belgian coal mines.

Source: Le Drapeau rouge. Quotidien du Parti communiste de Belgique. 05.02.1951, n° 29; 30e année. Bruxelles: Société populaire d'édition. "Menaces sur nos charbonnages", auteur:Joye, Pierre , p. 1.

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Towards the signing of the Schuman Plan

Our coal mines under threat

Word has it in Paris that the Schuman Plan is sure to be signed very shortly. However, they are also saying that there will be a gap of several weeks between the preliminary signing session and final signing of the treaty. In Belgium there are still serious doubts. In particular our coal industry is worried about the restrictions on output, which would mean closure for many pits. There is also stiff opposition to the dictatorial powers vested in the 'High Authority' responsible for running the whole coal and steel industry in the countries concerned.

In May last year, when Mr Schuman proposed merging the coal and steel industries of Western Europe, the Communists were almost the only people to oppose the plan.

Right from the start we demonstrated that the primary aim of the plan — originally suggested to Mr Schuman by the Americans — was to facilitate German rearmament and to hand the overall running of the entire economy of Western Europe over to German corporations, under American control.

Straight away we denounced the particularly serious consequences this project would have for Belgium: massive closure of coal mines, downward levelling of wages and complete control of our essential industries handed over to the German-American corporations.

The Duvieusart government took no notice and hurriedly gave its full support to the planned 'pool'. Much of industry thoroughly approved of the plan and the leaders of the General Workers Federation of Belgium (FGTB) and the Belgian Socialist Party (PSB) enthusiastically greeted 'positive action in favour of peace'.

The situation has changed slightly since. After taking a closer look, employers — particularly in the coal industry — noticed the risks for their business inherent in the Schuman Plan. Although the current intensive rearmament and the resulting coal shortage may delay closure of some mines, it will be our pits that will suffer from the slightest economic downturn. The figures are perfectly clear in this respect. The moment overall coal output in Europe exceeds immediate demand, the 'less profitable' Belgian mines will be sacrificed, down to the very last one.

So for the time being we are faced with a situation that may seem paradoxical.

The Pholien government, in its role as the government of Belgian capitalists, cannot unreservedly subscribe to a plan that will damage influential industries, and will in fact damage the Belgian economy as a whole.

But today the 'Belgian' government is not just the government of Belgian capitalists: the latter have pinned their hopes on the United States, on which they are counting to defend their class privileges.

So the Pholien government cannot ignore the fact that over and above the Belgian bosses there is the big boss in Washington, who often charges a rather high price for his 'protection' but who must be obeyed, whatever the cost.

And Washington wants the Schuman Plan to be implemented.

With a heavy heart, Mr Pholien and Mr Meurice, while protesting here and there about little details, have resigned themselves to agreeing to a project that no one in Belgium really wants any more, apart from the PSB and FGTB leaders, who persist in seeing 'the beginnings of Socialist theories on the internationalisation of basic industries' in what will be nothing more than a vast cartel dominated by German-American corporations.

As far as we are concerned, the fact that the coal bosses are now also against the Schuman Plan is not a reason to change our minds. These little sharks may not relish the idea of being swallowed by bigger German-American sharks, but that makes no difference to the underlying nature of the coal and steel pool.

The working class stands to gain nothing from the project sponsored by Mr Schuman — in his capacity as a loyal servant of the *Comité des Forges* — and by Mr Adenauer — a very good friend of Krupp.

And the fact that the FGTB has assured Belgian miners that they will qualify for ‘retraining’ so that they can be ‘redeployed’ to other industries is no incentive to accept closure of the mines and the ruin of all our coal fields.

Pierre Joye