

‘Belgium and the Schuman Plan’ from Le Phare Dimanche (9 July 1950)

Caption: On 9 July 1950, Raymond Scheyven, Belgian Christian-Socialist MP, gives an interview to the Brussels weekly newspaper Le Phare Dimanche in which he sets out his opinion on the Schuman Plan.

Source: Le Phare Dimanche. Hebdomadaire indépendant de Bruxelles & du monde. 09.07.1950, n° 236; 5e année. Bruxelles: Le Phare. "La Belgique et le plan Schuman", auteur:L.J , p. 1.

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Belgium and the Schuman Plan

Mr Raymond Scheyven, Member of Parliament for Brussels and a specialist on financial matters who recently gave us an interview on the European Payments Union, has been kind enough to give us his views on the Schuman Plan.

Firstly, Mr Scheyven told us, there is no Schuman Plan in the strict sense, just a Schuman idea which is deliberately unspecific about the practicalities and trusts to the empirical approach.

The idea is that the first thing to be done is to bring about the economic unification of Europe.

What was done in Strasbourg is by no means negligible; there were some fine speeches which serve the cause of Europe, but experience has shown that there are too many obstacles to the setting up of a European parliament for the moment. Remember that the British Government announced a devaluation of the pound the very day after the debates in Strasbourg, and you will understand why.

— But don't you think that there are just as many obstacles in the way of the economic unification of Europe (meaning an objective which is not necessarily total and immediate) as there are to the setting up of parliamentary institutions?

— I'm getting to that. I am a staunch supporter of economic unions: Benelux, France–Italy, the Scandinavian Union, all of this will one day make it possible to set up a European economic union with Germany and, no doubt, Britain. These regional unions are hard to set up. There is no point in going back over the differences of opinion that we have with our Dutch friends; let us hope that they will soon be ironed out. But the other regional unions are still up in the air.

That is why the idea came up (especially with Mr Schuman) of a European agreement on pooling the production of certain basic commodities and setting up a single market.

— A cartel?

— No. Not a cartel, that's the point. A limitation on production and the establishment of a price which gives a return, perhaps, but under the supervision of qualified representatives of the governments responsible, of the parliaments, and working together with the trade unions: that seems to me a long way from being a cartel.

— Is there really a risk of overproduction in the steel industry? Isn't the increase in output since the war matched by the rise in steel consumption?

— That is true in the United States, where the big steel consumers are the industries making motor vehicles, household appliances and tin cans. But comparable markets are difficult to find in Europe; there is a risk of overproduction.

As for our coal industry, you can get an idea of the critical situation it is in if you compare the figures for average prices per tonne: in Germany, 387 francs; in Britain, 334; in France, 495; in the Netherlands, 368; and in Belgium, 685. In the steel industry as well as the coal industry, our high prices, an inevitable outcome of our high wages (higher in this country than in our competitors), and the lesser devaluation of the Belgian franc than of the pound and the other European currencies, all make it impossible to adjust European prices below our level.

I am sure, Mr Scheyven concluded, that the European pool will set the level at the highest point, not the lowest.

L. J.