

‘Fear and necessity: the motives for Germany’s invitation to the wedding’
from Avanti (22 June 1950)


Caption: On 22 June 1950, the Italian Socialist daily newspaper Avanti speculates on the possible political and economic implications of the Schuman Plan and identifies the difficulties involved in implementing the French plan.

Source: Avanti. Quotidiano del Partito socialista italiano. 22.06.1950, n° 147; Anno LIV. Milano. "Invitò a nozze i tedeschi: ne aveva paura e bisogno", auteur:Dagnino, Virgilio , p. 4.

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Fear and necessity: the motives for Germany's invitation to the wedding (22 June 1950)

On 9 May 1950, France proposed to the Bonn Government a 'pooling' of capitalism's contradictions

The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950

On the afternoon of Tuesday 9 May 1950, in the great hall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman communicated to the journalists gathered there a statement concerning the initiative taken by the French Government that morning to establish an international organisation for coal and steel.

This statement and the address preceding it include the following major points:

'Five years after the unconditional surrender of Germany, France has taken the first decisive step towards European integration, and it invites Germany to participate in this process.

The Europe that is born of this initiative will be firmly united and its living standards will be raised due to the pooling of production, the widening of markets and the consequent lowering of prices.

In this Europe the Ruhr, the Saar and the French mineral deposits will be coordinated, working together to profit thereby all Europeans from both East and West, and all the territories that look to the old European continent for a stimulus for their development and prosperity. Since the rassemblement of the nations of Europe requires above all else the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany, the following plan emanating from the French Government is being submitted, to the German Government in particular.

France proposes to place Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole under a common higher authority, within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe.

In this way, common foundations for economic development will be laid as a first step in the federation of the United States of Europe, and any war between Germany and France will become impossible in years to come.

This production will be offered to the world as a whole without distinction, with the aim of contributing to promoting peace and, in particular, the development of the African Continent.

The precondition for these objectives is that the decisions of the new "international higher authority" which is to be instituted be binding for France, Germany, and other member countries.

In any case, this "authority" will have to secure in the shortest possible time the modernisation of production and the improvement of its quality; the supply of coal and steel on identical conditions to the markets of all the member countries; the development in common of exports to other countries; and the equalisation of living conditions of workers in the coal and steel industries of the member countries.

Pending the realisation of these objectives, transitional measures will have to be instituted: the application of a production and investment plan; the establishment of compensating machinery for equating prices; the creation of an amortisation fund to facilitate rationalisation; the freeing of member countries from all customs duty; the elimination of differential transport rates; and a more rational distribution of production.

In contrast to international cartels, which tend to share out and exploit national markets by means of restrictive practices on production and sales, and also to maintain high profits, the proposed new organisation will ensure the fusion of markets and the expansion of production.

The above principles and undertakings will be the subject of treaties signed by the States and submitted to the ratification of their Parliaments.

The common higher authority entrusted with the management of the scheme will be composed of independent persons appointed by the Governments on an equal basis. A chairman will be chosen by common agreement between the Governments. This authority's decisions will have executive force in France, Germany, and other member countries.

The institution of the higher authority will in no way prejudice the methods of ownership of enterprises. In the exercise of its functions the common higher authority will take into account the powers conferred upon the International Ruhr Authority and the obligations of all kinds imposed on Germany, so long as these remain in force.'

This declaration, made by Schuman in the name of the French Government on the eve of the Atlantic Conference to be held in London, raises a series of questions that impinge on the nature of political movements, the position of the various countries concerned, the possibilities of effective realisation and the likely future consequences.

The likely political motives behind the Schuman proposal

The Schuman proposal is characterised not merely by its content but also (and, perhaps, above all) by the timing and the manner of its presentation. It raises a number of questions, some perhaps fanciful, but others certainly realistic:

- 1) Why was London kept in the dark until the last minute?
- 2) Why did Schuman forget that a proposal concerning West Germany in particular ought to have been subjected to preliminary examination by the Allied occupation powers?
- 3) Why, by pursuing this sensational approach to diplomacy, did Schuman want to emphasise the germ of a possible Paris–Bonn axis conceived in Washington?
- 4) Why did Schuman leave the problem of the Saar in the background?
- 5) Why did Schuman wish to give the impression that his proposal had nothing to do with the traditional cartels and their systems for exploiting the markets by means of monopolies?
- 6) Why was Schuman's proposal made on the eve of the London Conference?

All these questions may be answered in two ways. Some people hold that it is Schuman's intention to lay the economic foundations of a European economic bloc able to act as the nucleus of a 'third force' wishing to withdraw from the 'Cold War' and present itself at some point as an arbiter between East and West. For others, the Schuman proposal has the objective, with the agreement of Washington, of favouring the economic integration of Western Europe (Germany included) and placing the United Kingdom with its back to the wall. How, in fact, is it possible to re-arm the Atlantic nations without German participation? And were Germany to be exempted from the onus of weapons manufacture, would its steel industry not become more dangerous where commercial competition for civil products is concerned?

Is it conceivable that the capitalist nations should spend their money to 'protect' the West against the wicked Bolsheviks without calling on Germany to make its contribution? If they did so, the capitalist nations would condemn themselves to bankruptcy in the face of German competition offering prices unfettered by the costs of rearmament!

However, if Germany is destined irrevocably to participate in the re-arming of the West and if this cannot be excluded, one might as well gather all the problems together in one great heap, discuss them as a whole and face up to reality. The German steel used for armaments represents that much less commercial steel competing on the world market; it is that much more steel that can be used in the anti-Soviet struggle

without weighing upon the French, British and US budgets.

What is the danger for the West? The answer is simple: this German steel should be clearly destined for the anti-Soviet struggle in order to avoid the danger that it be used to back up any claims that may be made against the Western States themselves in the future. Germany therefore needs to be integrated into the Atlantic system both economically and politically (the Council of Europe) pending its official integration militarily as well. Britain therefore has to decide to overcome its bashfulness and assume its responsibilities in the face of concrete proposals. An exciting plan (such as Schuman's) has to satisfy both the business requirements of the industrialists and the military requirements of the Chiefs-of-Staff. It is also essential that the marginal Western disputes, such as the Saar, do not hinder the major struggle waged against the anti-Capitalist countries.

Since the United States is resolved to wager increasingly on Germany, France has no alternative other than to go along with them — or pretend to go along with them — or to abandon the Atlantic policy.

Virgilio Dagnino