

Record of conversations between Ernest Bevin, Dean Acheson and Robert Schuman (London, 11 May 1950)

Caption: On 11 May 1950, two days after the Schuman Declaration, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman and US Secretary of State Dean Acheson meet in London, where Ernest Bevin, unhappy at having been presented with a fait accompli, expresses his grievances to his French counterpart.

Source: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, [s.l.], Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, Records of the Cabinet Office, CAB. Anglo-French discussions regarding French proposals for the western European coal, iron and steel industries; Schuman plan, CAB 21/3235.

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Mr. Bevin said that he had asked for this meeting because His Majesty's Government were concerned at the form and timing of the announcement by the French Government in regard to German steel and coal. Considering their association with France, the presence of Mr. Acheson in Paris the day before the announcement, and the fact that these conferences were under way, it had made his position embarrassing, especially in the House of Commons, where it had naturally been assumed that he knew all about it. Moreover, according to the Times, M. Paris, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, had been informed of the proposal several days in advance. Mr. Bevin had pointed out that this was not a question which concerned France, Britain or the United States alone. All three Governments were administering Germany and he had thought that the principle of consultation had been established. He wondered whether this was intended to set a new precedent, and what deductions he should draw.

Mr. Acheson said he had a rather different feeling. He agreed it was very desirable that the three Governments should consult each other on all important questions, and especially on Germany, but it was not always possible. There were many occasions on which the United States Government were obliged to do things or make announcements which embarrassed their friends, either for internal reasons or to prevent leakage. There were also occasions, such as the devaluation of sterling, when other Governments had caused similar embarrassment. He admitted that the French announcement had embarrassed him personally because, though he was not a party to it, many people thought he must have been as he had been in Paris the previous day. He thought however that this was a contretemps which we ought to be able to live through.

M. Schuman said he was glad to have the opportunity of giving some explanations as he was most anxious that there should be no misunderstanding between the three Governments.

In the first place the French Government had only been considering this plan on the Ministerial level for a week, though there had of course been studies on the subject by experts since long before the war. It was therefore not a question of long-prepared programme. Secondly, the French Government did not regard this on a question solely affecting Franco-German relations. What they wanted was a European organisation. Naturally the question of their relations with Germany was very much on their minds. They were much concerned about the general impasse which had been reached especially in regard to the international control of the Ruhr, and by the disappointing news of deadlock over Law 75. They had felt obliged to precipitate matters. Their primary desire was to start a European economic organisation.

Thirdly, even from the strictly German aspect it was an inter-allied question. France naturally could not negotiate with Germany separately as the Occupation Statute made all three Governments equally responsible. For this reason he wanted to make it clear that there was no question of a decision having been taken. It was merely a proposal, which should be discussed between the Governments concerned and which required technical study. Above all, there was no *fait accompli*. There had been occasions such as the recognition of the Chinese Communist Government and certain actions in Libya and Palestine when Governments were confronted by *faits accomplis* but this was not one of them. The French Government had wanted to produce a psychological shock both on the European and on the German plans. He hoped Mr. Bevin would be prepared to regard the matter in its proper proportions.

M. Schuman added that one of the reasons why they had not been able to wait to consult the other Governments had been the danger of leakage; some hints of the proposal had indeed already begun to appear.

Mr. Bevin said in that case he assumed that so far as the German part in any discussions were concerned it would be dealt with by the High Commission.

M. Schuman said this was certainly the case since the High Commission was responsible for Germany's

foreign policy. The French Government had not negotiated with anybody and it was a purely French initiative.

Mr. Bevin said he would give the above explanation to his Government.

M. Schuman said that, having made the above statement, he would like to offer his personal regrets for any embarrassment that might have been caused to the other two Ministers.