

THE SCHUMAN PLAN AND THE BRITISH ABDICATION OF LEADERSHIP IN EUROPE



EDMUND DELL



The Schuman Plan and the British Abdication of Leadership in Europe, Edmund Dell, Oxford University Press, 1995, 0198289677, 9780198289678, 323 pages. This book provides the first detailed examination of the Attlee government's rejection of British participation in the Schuman Plan in 1950, and hence of a leading role in fashioning European political and economic integration. Many received myths are contested: the Schuman Plan was not a bolt from the blue; domestic political circumstances did not make it impossible for Britain to join; participation would not have been incompatible with Britain's global and Commonwealth roles. Edmund Dell assesses Ernest Bevin's conduct as Foreign Secretary during this last year of his life: in declining health but still believing himself indispensable, he was arrogantly mistaken about the Schuman Plan and lacked colleagues of comparable stature able to tell him he was wrong. The only hope was Stafford Cripps, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but he was on the point of resignation due to ill-health and lacked the energy to press his doubts. Ministerial inadequacy was compounded by the Foreign Office, the leading officials in which were no less arrogant and quite as blind to the implications of the proposal. The consequence was a major policy failure which has influenced Britain's relations with its European partners right up to the present. Edmund Dell works with archival evidence, and the memoirs of participants, to place these events in the context of the 'big questions' dominating British policy formation: security, the dollar shortage, and the difficult relationship with an American administration intent both on attacking the sterling area and pressing for European federation..

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