

Memorandum on preparations for the Hague Congress (22 January 1948)


Caption: On 22 January 1948, the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity sets out the practical objectives of the forthcoming Congress of Europe held in The Hague.

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Memorandum on preparations for the Hague Congress on European unity (22 January 1948)

1. The idea of a great international event to promote European unification would certainly be a very good thing if the purpose of this event were to bring international public attention to the issue and to designate the establishment of the United States of Europe as the common goal of the efforts of all European democratic forces.

However, a generic publicity campaign to promote European unity as a means of safeguarding peace would serve no purpose. With peace, we want freedom. Hitler also sought European unity, and we are currently witnessing an attempt to unite the Balkan States which, while brandishing a federalist banner, certainly cannot be considered to be an attempt to put our ideas into practice.

The Hague Congress cannot be presented as a kind of constituent assembly along the lines of the States-General of the French Revolution, as proposed by Mr Marc of the UEF; but nor should it be structured like a Tower of Babel, an assembly of people from across the political spectrum who defend the most conflicting ideas.

It is better, in our opinion, not to waste time organising international conferences such as the rallies held by pacifists, who have continued for a century to meet regularly in Europe in order to demonstrate that all peoples are brothers, that war is a criminal folly and that market unification would greatly improve the well-being of society as a whole. These are empty words that do not even serve to educate people.

Once the objective has been clearly defined — the United States of Europe — the international conference could usefully discuss how to go about achieving such a goal (should we seek to secure a majority in European parliaments so that representatives might be delegated to an international conference in order to lay the foundations for the convening of a European constituent assembly?), and determine which countries could be united by federal ties (guarantee of the free choice of representatives in the federal state bodies), the minimum powers to be transferred from the nation states to the federal state (guarantee of freedoms, foreign policy, military defence, customs, currency, migration, etc.) and the position taken by the federalists on the main events currently taking place in international politics (the Marshall Plan, the Białystok Declaration, the division of Germany, etc.).

2. The International Committee believed that the event in The Hague would be assured greater success if it invited people from across the political spectrum and asked them for a simple generic statement of sympathy for European unity.

In our opinion, with such a vague objective, the International Committee will achieve nothing more than keeping all serious people away from the event, those who have no desire to travel to The Hague simply to applaud some fine rhetoric that they can read about in greater comfort and at lesser expense in the newspapers.

In the same way that the brainwashing campaign to promote the Kellogg Pact, which aimed to outlaw the war, achieved nothing in terms of safeguarding peace, any brainwashing campaign to promote a conference in The Hague where idealistic statements would be made in favour of European unity — statements that every individual would interpret as he wished — would not result in any progress being made towards the political unification of our continent.

The only outcome of such events is to divert public attention from practical objectives, creating the illusion of a movement towards peace even when we are treading a path that, going by experience, leads to war.

3. In the minutes of the meetings of the Central Committee held on 13 and 14 December, the term 'delegates' is frequently used, and it is stated that, except in rare cases, these delegates will be selected not as individuals, but in their capacity as leaders or eminent members of a profession, organisation, parliamentary group, etc.

However, it is clear that it would not be possible for the genuine representatives of professional organisations, churches and so on to come to The Hague. Moreover, it is not possible to say whether such leaders or eminent persons would also be those whose ideas best reflect the goals that we are seeking to achieve. It is often precisely these nationalists against whom we must campaign.

We have been greatly concerned by what we have learned from Mr Retinger and Mr Sandys — that Mr Brugmans visited Spain and Portugal to encourage the establishment of a committee that would propose the list of people to be invited from those two countries and that, if it were not possible to form appropriate delegations from some countries, consideration would be given to selecting representatives of these same countries from among their exiles living abroad.

We are well aware — given our understanding of Fascism — that Spain and Portugal could, at present, send only those delegates who have been selected by their totalitarian governments, or with the consent of those governments: in our view, no useful work towards a federal union of Europe would be possible with such delegates.

Moreover, whilst we agree that people who come from the USSR or from other countries under direct Soviet influence could not participate at The Hague, we also believe that the participation of White Russians and exiles from countries such as Poland, Hungary or Rumania would give the event an anti-Soviet character, which is not our intention.

In our opinion, federalists should be invited to The Hague only in a personal capacity; they should be selected from among people who are genuinely democratic and who might have a real influence in shaping public opinion in their countries.

We shall certainly not be able to send 100 people from Italy to The Hague. We should settle for 10 people, 20 at most, while securing government assistance to cover travel expenses.

4. The specific proposal which, according to what Mr Sandys has just told us, should emerge from the Hague Congress — i.e. the appointment by governments of an international standing committee to address all issues of common interest to European states — echoes the idea put forward by Aristide Briand, who advocated the establishment of a special European Section of the League of Nations.

It is an idea in which we have no confidence for the same reasons that prevented Mr Churchill from having confidence in the League of Nations from the very beginning and that prevent us from seriously considering proposals for the unification of markets, for arms control and for the setting up of courts and an international police force, if such proposals do not relate to specific limitations of national sovereignty by means of transferring the relevant powers to a supranational body.

5. We would be delighted if Mr Churchill were one of the most eminent persons to attend the Hague Congress, but we would not like it if he were the only true representative present, nor would we be willing to sign a blank cheque over to him.

We remember Mr Churchill's efforts during the war in the struggle against Fascism and Nazism, we remember the proposal that he made to the French Government after Dunkirk and we remember that he was one of the first proponents of the idea of European unification, but we also remember the responsibility that he bore in Yalta and in Potsdam for the division of Europe into spheres of influence and for the destruction of Germany. Moreover, Mr Churchill's post-war speeches in defence of British imperialist policy and a union of Western countries (a union in which Britain does not intend to take part but which it would be likely to use as a weapon against Russia) do little to reassure us.

Alongside Mr Churchill and on the same footing as him, we should like to see present in The Hague other persons from across the political spectrum (such as Stafford Cripps, Hugh Dalton, Leon Blum, Luigi Einaudi and Thomas Mann) who are capable of offsetting his influence, and we should like the Coordinating

Committee to agree with Mr Churchill and any other potential speakers on the subject of the speeches.

Mr Retinger and Mr Sandys have informed us that it was almost certain that Mr Cripps, Mr Blum and Paul-Henri Spaak would participate in the Hague Congress. The presence of these individuals would be enough for us. However, the news that we have just received from foreign Socialist delegates to the Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, which is currently taking place in Rome, seems to exclude such participation.

We shall not succeed in involving in this initiative those persons from Italy whom we should particularly like to attend if we are not better informed on this matter.

6. Without further clarification of the aims of the Hague Congress, we shall not be able to assist with the drafting of the economic report.

The report — for example on the problem of labour — that Mr Retinger has offered to draw up for us would have an entirely different impact depending on whether the objective was a federal union of Europe or simply agreements between sovereign states along the lines of those adopted by the members of the ILO.

In the first instance, we could easily contribute some innovative and extremely interesting points (by developing the ideas expressed by Professor Lionel Robbins in his essay published by the Federal Union — A Symposium, London 1940); in the second, we would need only to repeat what has been said a thousand times at international conferences and has been rendered obsolete by new statistics.

7. In conclusion, we shall not be able to be involved in the establishment of the committee for the drawing up of the list of Italians to be invited to The Hague:

(a) unless we are certain that other eminent persons apart from Mr Churchill will attend the Congress and will speak, persons of a political position that is different from that of Mr Churchill — especially British Labour leaders and European Socialist leaders;

(b) unless the Italian committee will be given the specific task of putting forward the names of persons selected from the various social groups and of different political opinions and who, on the basis of their experience and their democratic faith, provide sufficient proof of their support for the Federal Union of Europe;

(c) unless it is specified that the International Committee may reject the names of persons nominated by the Italian committee but that it will not be able to invite other persons from Italy who have not been proposed by the Italian committee.