

'Do we really want to build a united Europe?' from Fédération (October 1948)

Caption: In October 1948, in an article published in the French journal Fédération, Raymond Silva, Secretary-General of the Union of European Federalists, sounds a warning for the unity of the European continent and reviews the British position on the plan for a federal Europe.

Source: Fédération. Revue de l'ordre vivant. dir. de publ. Richard, Max. Octobre 1948, n° 45. Paris: Imprimerie de la Seine. "Veut-on, oui ou non, faire l'Europe", auteur:Silva, Raymond , p. 16-17.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/do_we_really_want_to_build_a_united_europe_from_federation_october_1948-en-8d37859e-2a41-4e45-9001-9801c46eddaa.html



Last updated: 06/07/2016

Problems of federalism

Do we really want to build a united Europe?

by Raymond SILVA

Secretary-General of the Union of European Federalists

Until the Congress of Europe in The Hague, European unification was simply a powerful idea. Now, if the peoples of Europe wake up to the dangers facing them, it can and should soon become a new political movement capable of completely changing the current balance of power.

The thinking public is more or less won over. Governments have made public statements in favour of limits on national sovereignty, and the Congress of the European Parliamentary Union, which held a session recently in Interlaken, has overwhelmingly endorsed the principle of a European Assembly in the making.

Will the United States of Europe at last take shape? Will yesterday's utopia become a political reality? It is hard to answer yes to this crucial question without an objective assessment of the attitude of the British Government, which is hesitant, to say the least.

Churchill recently called on Attlee to take the initiative and convene a European parliament, but Attlee declined the offer. He said he doubted that this was the right time to go ahead, because of the other problems facing the European governments, but he was prepared to reconsider the matter after the Commonwealth Conference in October. Does Attlee's attitude reflect the deep-seated feelings of the British people? It is hard to say. Men such as Churchill, Lord Layton, Macmillan, Mackay, Shawcross, Boothby and others have openly criticised the Prime Minister's position. However, it is Attlee who is in charge of British foreign policy. Barring unforeseen circumstances, he is unlikely to change his mind — unless the Labour Party itself encourages him to do so, which is not entirely out of the question. Many British Socialists, aware that support for a united Europe gives Churchill's Conservatives a tremendous electoral advantage, are inclined to take up the idea and open the debate to public opinion, which is a major force in British politics.

Will they be able to convince their fellow countrymen, insular by temperament and by tradition? No one can tell. The British are instinctively hostile to anything not 'made in Britain'. They are nervous about linking their destiny to the people of the Continent, where politics are generally more unstable, and they fear that in a federal Europe they will not be able to play their traditional role of arbiter. Moreover, they remain firmly attached to the notion of the Commonwealth, even more so since this great nation, having paid dearly for the freedom of us all, no longer alone determines the course of world politics. In response to their loss of material power, the British have become dogmatic and inward-looking — to the point where leaders of the Labour Party are warmly espousing nationalism.

Voices in Britain and elsewhere recommend caution. 'Before uniting and organising Europe,' some say, 'start by putting your own house in order.' Good common sense, at least on the surface. But what if the problems are insoluble on a national scale, if no European country can manage on its own, and if order at home can only be restored within the framework of a united Europe?

In the present circumstances, there is only one solution: to create Europe first, here and now; to take action where there is the greatest chance of success. If Britain, whose anxieties are legitimate and understandable, does not want to be the first to commit herself, leave her out and unite those nations that are eager to work together. If we want to avoid catastrophe, we must immediately establish a core around which those who hesitate can later gather. The worst thing would be to do nothing and maintain the status quo, on the grounds that conditions are not yet perfect. As far as we can see, they never will be.

A year ago, when one country alone managed to divide Europe, it was said: 'Without the East what use is there in trying?' If we had listened to those unwitting accomplices of Russian imperialism, all hope of a future European resurgence would now be lost.

According to yesterday's *Sunday Times*, we must seriously envisage the possibility of war. But must we make it inevitable? Will we, because of our differences, remain passive and cowardly, an easy prey to a united Eastern bloc? Or will we rouse ourselves in time and reassure the Americans, who are understandably discouraged by such a pitiful display, and show ourselves worthy of the Finns, whose determination to survive is an example to us all, or indeed the Yugoslavs, who are struggling in their own way to maintain their independence?

Europe without Britain is inconceivable. Britain belongs to the Continent, as she belongs to the Commonwealth. This special situation is in no way contradictory. Federalism is flexible enough to encompass it. And sooner or later, if the nucleus of a united community is established in Europe, British public opinion will insist she joins, and the same determination will be found in other countries.

Which will be the first group of nations to take the initiative and unite freely, creating an organisation with real delegated powers, not just some sort of European League of Nations? Benelux has shown the way, France and Italy are both committed, Austria and West Germany will find that integration in a united Europe is the only way to prevent the rise of pan-German aspirations fuelled by the Soviet Union. Possibly the Scandinavian countries will join, and maybe Portugal and Spain, once General Franco provides the necessary political guarantees that, according to a preliminary interview with Juan Carlos, seem likely. Even Yugoslavia, without abandoning its own specific form of government, may eventually want to create closer links with a strong and united Europe.

The programme outlined above can meet with the disapproval only of those who base their political calculations on strife and misery. It can be put into practice immediately and is the only way for us to achieve a gradual return to prosperity and to safeguard *in extremis* the fragile peace.