

'The Christian "Supranational"' from the Rheinische Post (17January 1948)

Caption: On 17 January 1948, commenting on the forthcoming congress of the Nouvelles équipes internationales (NEI), the German daily newspaper Rheinische Post looks at the political evolution of the Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Source: Rheinische Post. Zeitung für Politik und christliche Kultur. 17.01.1948. Düsseldorf: Rheinische Post. "Die christliche Übernationale".

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The Christian ‘Supranational’

The Christian Democratic parties of Western Europe — before the Conference in Luxembourg

From 30 January to 1 February, a meeting will be held in Luxembourg of Western European politicians who have one thing in common: the Christian and the democratic objectives of their policies. For the first time since Hitler was in power, German representatives will also be taking part in these discussions:

Dr Adenauer, Jakob Kaiser, Dr Josef Müller and Dr Löns. The meeting has been called by the NEI (Nouvelles Équipes Internationales), a French organisation, whose objective is to coordinate the Christian Democratic parties in Europe. These aspirations are very much welcomed not least by the Germans, for, as we have seen, Dr Joseph Müller put out a statement as long ago as in spring 1946 that a ‘Christian Union of Europe’ was the long-term goal of the German CDU/CSU. The Minister of Justice for Rhineland-Palatinate, Dr Süsterhenn, declared his commitment to this objective when he asked the French MRP, the party of the Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, to begin discussions about international cooperation between the Christian parties. The MRP complied with this request, and, before a year had elapsed, it had adopted a resolution in favour of a ‘European Federation’ at its annual conference in Paris. It is hardly surprising that these endeavours also received a sympathetic hearing in Great Britain. This was already apparent at an earlier date when the British press had undertaken a thorough investigation into the question of how far a Western European Christian ‘Supranational’ might be considered as a fundamental pillar in the politics of a Western Bloc. It would, however, be premature to invest in these discussions any great hopes that might actually be realised in the short term. Developments in France have clearly demonstrated that, first of all, the Christian Democratic movements will have to undergo a process of consolidation. It is probable that the corresponding parties in the other countries of Europe will also have to go through a similar crisis. Nevertheless, there are certain conclusions that may be drawn from a review of their development to date.

Austria

The ‘Austrian People’s Party’, the successor to the ‘Christian Socialist People’s Party’, secured a great victory in the most recent elections and, since then, has provided various members of the government, including the Federal Chancellor, Dr Figl, and the Foreign Minister, Dr Gruber. As the government party in an occupied country, it is naturally subject to the most enormous pressures. What is more, in the chaos of the post-war period, many elements from the middle classes, Conservative and Nationalist camps, who really do not belong in the party, have joined it. Its fate will depend to a very large extent on the political development of Austria, which will, of course, be determined by external factors: by Russia and by the Western Powers.

Switzerland and Italy

The representatives from Switzerland expected in Luxembourg will be from the ‘Conservative Party’, which is one of the three major parties in country and therefore operates in the top ranks of Swiss politics, this year providing the President of the Helvetic Confederation, Dr Celio. Although the proposal made some time ago by Dr Celio to rename his party the ‘Christian Democratic Party’ was not adopted, it is nevertheless indicative of the Conservatives that items from their 1894 political manifesto, such as Western culture, social advancement and the guarantee of personal freedoms, are still alive today in the Alpine valleys, and, in recent times, have even acquired a new, more powerful effect in connection with their pan-European aspects.

The ‘Democrazia Cristiana’ Party of Italy has been embroiled in serious conflict with the very strong and active Communists on the Apennine Peninsula during recent weeks and indeed months. For the Christian Democrats, who provide the Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, but who have, at the same time, taken on the character of a catch-all party of disparate forces, this struggle, which is a true test of stamina, can only be an advantage. For it is well known that, when you shake a tree, only the rotten fruit falls off. The party is the successor to the ‘Catholic People’s Party’, which was founded in 1909 by Luigi Sturzo and had become the third largest party in the country as early as in 1919. Even at that stage, elements of the middle classes were joining forces in it, and they were intent on placing themselves under clerical leadership. After the fall of Mussolini, the People’s Party was re-established as the Christian Democratic Party and constantly emerged

victorious from the elections. One defining characteristic of its new face is its rejection of the monarchy. However, more important for it than this domestic policy position is its international significance, for, just like Germany and Austria, Italy is today in the front line of the conflict between East and West. The Democrazia Cristiana Party adopted its position on this conflict a long time ago, and its fundamental point of view has been formulated by its Secretary-General as follows: 'Italian civilisation is a Western and a Christian civilisation.'

France

Who will come to Luxembourg from the ranks of the great and good within the Mouvement Républicain Populaire? Maurice Schumann, Maritain or perhaps even Bidault? Whoever it may be, these representatives will take a different stance from the one that they would have been able to take less than a year ago, for, in the meantime, the MRP has suffered heavy losses, because of the electoral success of General de Gaulle. In spite of this, the nucleus of this party is intact, supported as it is, of course, by the very active Catholic youth movement in France and by the best forces of the Resistance. These are surely also the factors that explain the large gains made by the party in the 1945 and 1946 elections. In the National Assembly, it currently still has 166 Members. However, the MRP will have to rid itself of many of its hangers-on, because it has, after all, provided a home for a large number of floating and predominantly reactionary groups, who had, temporarily, become politically homeless as a result of the war. Even once it has come through this process, there can be no doubt that the MRP will remain a power of the first order in French politics.

Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland

The Belgian Christian Democrats also constitute the largest political grouping in their country as the 'Christian Social Party'. It is an extremely right-wing party and, in domestic policy, it is distinct from the other parties above all by its support for the King, who is at present living in exile in Switzerland. The question of the King was also the issue that caused it to withdraw its Ministers from the Government in August 1945. One of the roots from which it draws its strength is the fact that it is a party of young people. More than two thirds of its Members of Parliament come from youth organisations. It is also probably thanks to this situation that the party, which previously called itself the 'Catholic People's Party', now emphasises its supra-denominational character and puts forward a social policy of rebuilding human society and Western civilisation.

The strength of the Luxembourg Catholic Party is the expression of the traditional religious orientation of the inhabitants of that small country. Out of 51 parliamentary seats, the party won 23 in the first post-war elections and therefore played the leading part in the government coalition. The Christian element is even stronger in the life of political parties in the neighbouring Netherlands, where the 'Labour Party' was newly founded under the influence of the Social Democrats, the Christian Democratic Union and other parties and pursued a kind of Socialism based on ethical and religious principles. In second place is the 'Catholic People's Party', followed by the 'Anti-revolutionary Party', the political wing of the orthodox Calvinists, and the 'Christian Historical Union', a right-wing Protestant party, which broke off from the Calvinists in 1805.

Northern Europe

The representatives in Luxembourg from Denmark, which is also represented in the NEI, will probably consist of no more than a delegation from the 'Georgistisk Retsforbund'. This is a right-wing organisation and is also often referred to as the Christian People's Party. For the time being, it is still a splinter party with some items relating to religion on its agenda. Given the fundamental spiritual and religious attitudes in the country, this is not surprising, but the organisation is nevertheless worthy of attention, since, in the most recent elections, it did, after all, double the size of its parliamentary party of six Members in comparison with 1945 and even trebled it in comparison with 1943. Although Northern European representation at the Luxembourg Conference will be no more than peripheral, this has as little meaning as the fact that Great Britain has, to date, not been represented in the NEI at all. Christian Democracy is so much taken for granted in these countries that it is practically beyond any need for discussion. After all, no less a person than

Sir Stafford Cripps long ago anticipated the topic for discussion at the Luxembourg Conference in the title of his book 'Towards Christian Democracy'.