

Address given by Ernest Bevin (Paris, 22 September 1947)

Caption: On 22 September 1947, the final day of the Paris Conference on European Economic Cooperation, the British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, expresses his satisfaction with the substance of the final report submitted by the French diplomat Hervé Alphand and hopes that he will see a devastated Europe rise from the ashes.

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Address given by the Right Honourable Ernest Bevin, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at the final session in Paris, 22nd September, 1947

I am sure it gives great pleasure to this Conference to receive today the report of the Committee of Co-operation from the Rapporteur General, Mr. Alphand.

I should like at the outset to join with the previous speaker to congratulate him and the many authors of the report, from among each of the sixteen countries represented here, on the production of a most clear and well thought-out document on an extremely complex subject.

The amount of information which has been assembled is impressive.

The way in which it is presented deserves high praise.

I have followed the work of the Committee of Co-operation and of its technical Committees very closely during these two months, and I know only too well the enormous amount of hard work and hard thought which has gone to the production of this report.

It would be invidious to single out credit for the high quality of the report, but I am sure that the Committee would wish me to make special mention of the work performed by the Rapporteur General and the staff of assistants drawn from a number of Delegations who have worked so harmoniously and so effectively together.

I am very glad that the Committee of Co-operation have taken advantage of the offer of friendly aid in the drafting of the report which the United States Secretary of State offered to make available, and I am sure that I voice the feelings of all when I express our gratitude to the representative of the United States Government who have helped us with a series of most valuable suggestions.

I feel confident that the points of presentation of which they gave us helpful advice will add to the value of the report when it is read and studied in the United States.

It has fallen to us today to receive the Committee's report, and I confidently assume that it will be the unanimous decision of the members of the Conference that this report shall be transmitted to Mr. Secretary Marshall.

The preparation of this report marks a new stage in the history of international endeavour, and I believe that it will prove not only a valuable and informative document in itself, but an initial step in the process of closer economic co-operation within Europe itself.

It is an indication that when people meet to agree, they do agree.

The work which has been achieved here has been done without regard to ideology.

It is my earnest hope that the countries here assembled, whatever attempts may be made to thwart, frustrate or divert their efforts, will continue the drive forward in this work.

We have set our hands to the plough.

We must not be deflected from our course.

As I said at the opening of the Conference which set up this Committee — and I know that here I express the feelings of all represented today — we greatly regret the absence of those European countries who have not participated in this Conference.

We continue to regret their absence.

For the future, as in the past, the door remains wide open to all those of good will who want to contribute to the healthy life of Europe and thereby end the misery which war has left behind.

Our goal is the economic unity of Europe as the best means that we can conceive to provide for the happiness of its people.

This surely must remain the goal of all who have the welfare of Europe at heart.

The report which you have prepared, and which in a few days the world will read with deep attention, strikingly illustrates what the countries concerned can hope to achieve in the field of production and of economic collaboration over the next 4 years.

It shows how a new Europe could come into being if adequately assisted now.

It sets forth evidence, which I believe will astonish the world, of the great potential resources of the old continent and of the resilience of its peoples and their determination to work energetically to increase production and to raise their living standards from the low point to which they have fallen in the aftermath of war.

The Report reveals a vitality of purpose, unsuspected by some observers from afar, in a war-torn Europe.

It is not an appeal for charity.

It is a legitimate request for assistance to tide over the period of recovery and to create in turn a situation in which Europe can make its contribution to the post-war world.

The Committee of Co-operation has been seized of the magnitude of the problem and has not shrunk from facing it.

The stark fact is recognised, that the programme for European recovery cannot be accomplished by Europe's unaided efforts.

There are two reasons for this.

One reason is that Europe is, even in normal times, very dependent on supplies from the rest of the world which are the lifeblood of her industries.

The other is that, as a result of the destruction of her resources caused by war, her industries are run down and in need of repair.

As a result, she cannot produce enough to provide exports with which to pay for her normal imports, still less for the abnormal imports she requires for replacement purposes and in substitution for sources of supply no longer available.

These are the essential facts of the European economy today.

They are well known to all of you, but it is worth emphasising them because it is these facts which explain the gap between what the countries, members of this Committee, hope to do in the production field, and what it lies in their own power to do.

The gap can only be narrowed by self-help and mutual help.

The Committee's plans provide for the fullest possible use of European resources within Europe, consistent with the need for maintaining and increasing exports in order to earn the means with which to pay for

imports.

But the gap cannot be closed by Europe's efforts alone.

It can be closed only if Europe is provided with the means with which to obtain the tools — food, coal, steel, equipment — which have to be imported and which are essential to set her recovery programme in motion.

After all, Gentlemen, Europe has paid the biggest price in life, suffering and devastation.

Europe has been the theatre of war in which a great part of the recent conflicts have been waged.

Surely she now has the right to a respite from her travails.

She has earned a right to engage in work for peace and prosperity.

The European countries were invited by the Secretary of State, representing the American people, to say what they could do and what contribution they could make.

Well, here is our report.

It is now for the American people and the American Congress to decide whether this programme, undertaken at Mr. Marshall's initiation, should be fulfilled, and whether Europe can by this means contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world.

Since we all met together here a little over 2 months ago, the economic situation of most of the countries of the world has gravely deteriorated.

The crisis which was looming then is upon us now.

Though the countries of Europe possess many natural resources of great benefit to the world, many of us are rapidly losing the last reserves of the foreign exchange which we must have to sustain the life, and still more to generate the activity of our peoples.

In a matter of weeks, not to say of months, we shall be facing a unique situation and immediate steps are necessary.

Misery, starvation and widespread unemployment have been known before, but they have been due in the past either to a breakdown of law and order, or to a world-wide breakdown of the economic system.

Today, there is no question of supply out-running demand.

The demand is there, but it cannot be filled because of the lack of means of external payment.

If such a crisis develops fully, there is no precedent in history for judging what shape it may take.

It is this current situation in Europe which makes this Committee's report so timely and so particularly important.

This account of what the participating countries and Western Germany could achieve has to be read against the sombre background of their possible destiny in the coming months.

If the urgent dangers which we now face are averted, then we can move forward with greater confidence into the hopeful future of which this report is striking evidence.

If misfortune befalls us, then we shall descend to still lower levels of economic activity from which it will be

all the harder to raise ourselves, and which is likely to pull down by its sheer weight the economic structure of many other parts of the world.

I do not propose to enter into any detail about the matters covered by the report.

The report will speak for itself.

If it does not give an exhaustive or definitive picture of Europe's problems, that is because the situation itself is subject to continuous change.

Notwithstanding the shortness of the time at the disposal of the Committee, I cannot imagine that it would have been possible to give a clearer or better background picture of the essential facts of the economy of the countries concerned, of the grave problems which they are facing, or of the action, both national and collective, by which they aspire to surmount them.

This leads me to mention once more the devoted labours of the members of the Committee, to which this important and harmonious work is due.

This also is the place to voice the appreciation of all of us for the efficient and comfortable arrangements made by our hosts, the French Government.

I regret the absence of Mr. Bidault, who is occupied elsewhere, and I am sure that he would have wished to be present in order to participate in the final act of this Conference as he did at its opening as representative of one of the two convening Powers.

I should like to say a word in conclusion to those of my colleagues who have come here today to join me in signing this report.

First, I would like to thank them for coming to Paris to lend the distinction of their presence to the historic ceremony.

Secondly, I would say this to them.

There is a long road to travel before the economy of Europe is re-established.

But this report which we accept today is something more than a mere report.

It is the beginning of a great co-operative endeavour.

Indeed, it represents the forging of links between the countries, which time will strengthen, and which I hope will soon be joined by other links with these members of the European community who are not with us now.

May the spirit which has prevailed in the Committee of Co-operation in Paris help to fortify and encourage us in the difficult months and years which lie ahead, and may our descendants acclaim this work, which has been carried out in this ancient and historic capital, as a unifying effort never equalled in Europe's long and troubled past.