

Letter from Joseph Retinger to Denis de Rougemont (29 March 1948)

Caption: On 29 March 1948, Joseph Retinger, Secretary-General of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, sends to Denis de Rougemont, who has been appointed rapporteur for the Cultural Committee at the forthcoming Congress of Europe, a letter in which he defines the nature and scope of the preamble to the Hague Declarations. This will become known as the 'Message to Europeans'.

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Copy of a letter to Monsieur Denis de Rougemont

29th March, 1948

16, Westminster Palace Gardens
Artillery Row,
London, S.W. 1.

As you know, I am very strongly in favour - as soon as the inaugural speeches of the Congress are over - to announce the declaration prepared by the Cultural Committee and agreed upon by the two other Committees, which will define the cultural and spiritual background of our gathering and our joint activities. I visualise it as a sort of manifesto, a directive to all men of good will, interested in peace and prosperity of Europe, which can only be achieved through the Unity of Europe.

I consider that this declaration ought to form the starting point of our joint work and after the Congress it must become a manifesto of the whole international European movement. Just like the peace pledge in England a few years before the war was covered with some 13 million signatures - in the same way we must endeavour to have this manifesto supported by million of signatures of Europeans, thus creating a very strong popular movement as each signatory would not fail to remember his signature and his pledge. It cannot fail also to produce an additional pressure on timid and recalcitrant governments.

The launching of such a manifesto ought to constitute one of the principal and immediate objects of the Congress and of our movement. It ought, by the work of collecting signatures, to keep our ideas constantly alive among the masses. Every meeting organised by our affiliated bodies must end in collecting these signatures (and eventually a few pence from each signatory to keep the work going).

For this purpose, however, the manifesto must be written in a very simple and understandable way and only the basical elements may be included in it - with tact but with courage.

There must be a definition of our moral conception of life, including a definition of the freedom of the individual as well as the Bill of Rights. There must be an explanation why only an economic and political co-operation of the European Continent - as part of the World - can achieve security and prosperity as well as individual and national welfare of all participants. There must be a reference to the division of Europe which, in the past, has made this impossible and a reference to the achievements due to the spirit of co-operation among the Swiss and the Americans.

From the political point of view I believe that we must demand (1) that even in the preliminary stages of the transformation of Europe - the administrative boards dealing with those problems must be endowed with some sovereign rights instead of remaining as projected consultative assemblies. (And here may be inserted a definition what really sovereign rights mean - for instance - according to Mr. Van Zeeland's words - that sovereign rights in no way can be better emphasized than by delegating parts of them for the sake of all participating nations).

In the second stage those sovereign rights of the governing boards of United Europe must emanate from duly representative bodies of the citizens of Europe.

(2) That nationalism must serve peoples and not make them serfs for its own sake thus breeding national selfishness ("egoismo sacro" of Mussolini) and isolationist perils. Since there is no moral force dominating the whole of Europe as it happened sometimes in the past, it must be stated emphatically that internal and domestic politics cannot be jealously guarded by the respective governments of the states, but have to obey a common standard of political morality. We must not permit the creation and spreading of immoral ideologies, like the totalitarian systems, hostile to the spiritualistic conception of the world and which, when triumphant in one country - may be threatening the moral values of others and consequently therefore an international Court must be created with some executive powers to watch over such paths of domestic and internal politics which may have adverse repercussions amongst the neighbouring countries.

Those are some points which came to my mind during these sad Easter days, I communicate them to you and send a copy of this letter to some of our colleagues.

Dr. J. H. Retinger

Monsieur Denis de Rougemont
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