

'A Socialist in search of United Europe' from the Daily Mail (13 May 1948)

Caption: On 13 May 1948, in an article in the British daily newspaper Daily Mail, the Labour MP, Christopher Shawcross, member of the British delegation to the Congress of Europe in The Hague, explains why the Labour and Socialist Parties should have supported the Hague Congress. He also argues in favour of the establishment of a European Assembly and calls on Clement Attlee's Labour Government to endorse such an Assembly.

Source: Daily Mail. For King and Commonwealth. 13.05.1948, No 16.223. London.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/a_socialist_in_search_of_united_europe_from_the_daily_mail_13_may_1948-en-572f1610-88da-4943-91e0-d9625c3fad0c.html

Publication date: 20/09/2012

A Socialist in search of United Europe

by CHRISTOPHER SHAWCROSS, M.P., *one of the 23 Labour delegates to the Hague Congress of Europe.*

The best possible proof that our Labour Party and other Socialist parties in Europe should have given official support to the Hague Congress was the mass meeting held at The Hague on Sunday.

The speeches were pre-dominantly Socialist. Churchill was not even the principal speaker.

Moreover, if he had been absent from the platform, as our National Executive apparently wanted, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Maxwell Fyfe, Manningham-Buller, and other Conservatives would probably not have attended.

It is quite clear now from what the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons last week that the Labour Party must realise that a United Europe cannot be created by Socialists alone, nor can it be based upon an all-Socialist Europe.

Above the Party

What is not clear (but should be) is that European Union, whether federal or otherwise, is not and cannot be a matter of party politics. It is the political machinery within which the battle of Socialism can be fought out and won on a field of European democracy.

The 23 Socialist M.P.s who went to The Hague, therefore, were fighting for the very thing which all European Socialists, with Mr. Attlee as the first, want.

From this point of view the congress was an outstanding success, and I have not the smallest doubt that that is entirely due to the presence of the 23 Labour M.P.s who went; but they would not have gone and the conference would have been worse than useless had it not been for the magnificent leadership of R. W. G. Mackay backed by Leslie Hale.

As chairman of the whole British delegation, the majority of which was probably anti-Socialist, his performance was superb.

High tribute was paid to it by Harold Macmillan. And Macmillan's own performance in the political committee was second only to Mackay's.

'Real urgency'

The conference demanded in clause 4 of the political resolution the convening as a matter of real urgency of a European Assembly, chosen by the parliaments of the participating nations to carry out the following tasks :

- (a) To stimulate and give expression to European public opinion;*
- (b) To advise upon measures to bring about the necessary economic and political union of Europe; and*
- (c) To examine the juridical and constitutional implications arising out of the creation of such a union, and their economic and social consequences.*

The draft of this resolution in the form in which it was originally submitted to the conference was actually strengthened in two important particulars.

Without delay

At first the demand was for the convening of the assembly "as soon as practicable." The conference struck out these words as being calculated to promote indefinite delays, and substituted "as a matter of real urgency."

The original draft called for a deliberative assembly, but the conference deleted the word "deliberative" in order to make it clear that what was required was in fact a constituent assembly for Europe.

The remainder of the political report really does little more than indicate the basis upon which the constituent assembly should work; namely a charter of human rights enforced by a European court, and a democratic political and social system to preserve the peoples of the Union from all types of slavery and economic insecurity. The resolution goes farther than the all-party motion for Western Union debated in the House of Commons last week.

That motion requires, as a first step, the setting up of an emergency council for Europe, but the Hague Congress rejected an amendment designed to the same effect regarding it as already out of date.

So far from there being wide disagreement on these essentials, the votes were in fact overwhelming. It can, therefore, be taken as certain that the vast majority of those attending the conference (if not every single member) were in favour of a constituent assembly for Europe being called at the earliest possible moment.

How is this constituent assembly to be brought into being?

It is clear that it can be established only by the parliaments of the countries concerned acting through their Governments.

That means these parliaments must, by persuasion or vote, induce their respective Governments to take the necessary action. And whether this will be done rests largely, if not entirely, with the British and French Governments.

If they accept this proposal there is little doubt that the whole of Western Europe would support it to the fullest extent.

This now will be the acid test for Mr. Bevin's Western Union foreign policy. Does it really mean business, or is it nothing more than Churchill's Fulton Plan of a block of Western European States designed primarily for purposes of military defence?

Phrase or ideal?

If the Foreign Secretary really means business, neither he nor his colleagues in the Cabinet can have any objection to the immediate convening of a constituent assembly.

If, however, the Government refuses it will be clear that European Union is a mere phrase to describe an ideal which is recognised as unobtainable—a convenient cover plan to mask the fact that Western European co-operation is only required as a temporary measure to ensure effective application of Marshall Aid.