

Exchange of letters between Ronald William Gordon Mackay and Edward Beddington Behrens (October 1948)

Caption: On 14 and 19 October 1948, the British daily newspaper Daily Mail publishes an exchange of letters between the Labour MP Ronald W. G. Mackay, Vice-President of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU), and Edward Beddington Behrens, industrialist, which demonstrate the liveliness of the debates on the plans for a united Europe and a European Assembly.

Source: The Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science - Archives and Rare Books, London, 10 Portugal Street, WC2A 2HD. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/Default.htm>, Williams Juliet Evangeline Rhys (1898-1964); Baroness Rhys Williams; public servant. Economic Subcommittee minutes, correspondence and reports, 13 October 1947-31 May 1949, RHYS WILLIAMS J/6/2.

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Which is best for Europe—Union or an Assembly?

From Mr. R. W. G. MACKAY, M.P.

To the Editor of The Continental Daily Mail.

14th October, 1948.

SIR,—The question of a European Union and of a European Assembly is very much to the fore, but there are the widest divergences of views with regard to both, and it is important in the discussion of these subjects that we should be clear as to what we are talking about.

The International Committee for Movements for European Union recently made proposals which the French Government subsequently put before the British, the Dutch and the Belgians; and at Interlaken a large number of Members of Parliament from all countries met together and drafted proposals for a European Assembly.

The terms of reference for the Assembly in the French proposals are six. Three of these are:—

- 1.—To consider practical measures to secure the progressive, political and economic integration of Europe.
- 2.—To study the constitutional, economic and social problems inherent in the creation of a European Union.
- 3.—To make recommendations for action in regard to the above matters to the Governments of the participating nations and to appropriate inter-Governmental agencies.

The resolution of the Interlaken Plan provides that the Assembly be asked to submit to the Governments proposals relating to immediate practical measures to be taken to bring about the economic and political union of Europe, and to prepare and draft a multilateral agreement to implement such measures.

If the French Government proposals mean what they say, what is the difference? Both want the Assembly to consider practical measures to secure the political and economic integration of Europe.

The Interlaken Plan does not confer on the Assembly constitution-making powers. Any proposals it makes must be submitted to the respective Governments for their acceptance or rejection.

If recommendations for action are to be made for a European Union, some document, be it a memorandum, a constitution or a treaty, must be prepared.

A European Union means only one thing, that is, what it says. The union of England and Scotland is one example; that was a complete merger of the Governments of the two countries.

The word "union" excludes alliances, associations of nations like the League and UNO, Councils of Foreign Ministers or such co-operative arrangements as are provided by the Brussels Pact and the Paris Agreement.

In none of these cases do the States surrender to a new State any of their powers of government and the word "union" presupposes such surrender.

If advisory bodies were good enough today, the League would have succeeded, and UNO would be meeting with better success.

The phrase "European Union" was defined at Interlaken in terms of a Parliament of Western Europe and a

Government with power over such matters as currency, defence and economic planning.

The merit of the Interlaken proposals lies in the fact that, unofficial though the Congress was, the 200 Members of Parliament present, with one dissentient, agreed on a clear plan for a European Union, and a statement of the principles which set out some of the principal matters which any assembly would have to consider.

All of these are questions which must be faced by any European Assembly, and while it won't have constitution-making powers, any plan or recommendations as envisaged by The Hague resolutions, or by the French proposals, must be in the nature of a constitution.

There are three fields in which co-operation (or activities) is needed—defence, economic and political.

In the field of defence we already have a functional approach, the *ad hoc* body being the organisation under the Brussels Treaty.

In the economic field we already have the O.E.E.C., an *ad hoc* body for dealing with the economic problems of Western Europe.

The only field in which nothing is being done is the political field. Therefore any assembly must deal with the political question of European Union, for which there can be no *ad hoc* bodies, and no functional, or step by step, approach.

Yours, etc.,

House of Commons.

R. W. G. MACKAY.

Would Britain agree to a joint Budget with France?

To the Editor of The Continental Daily Mail.

19th October, 1948.

SIR,—The letter of my friend Mr. R. W. G. Mackay, M.P., in your issue of October 14 bears the charming simplicity of irresponsibility.

But do such views further the cause of European Union or do they not, on the contrary, help to organise public opinion against it, because of the unpractical nature of the proposals put forward?

The idea of a complete federation as he put it forward at the Interlaken Conference, in which, for instance, Great Britain and France would have the same relation to one another in a European Federation as Texas and Arizona in the United States of America, is complete moonshine as an immediate practical proposal.

I challenge him to get the support of one single member of his party in the present Cabinet for such a policy.

Can we see England pooling her financial resources and having a joint budget with France at the present moment?

Would the British taxpayer, who pays his heavy taxes loyally, agree to being taxed still further to compensate for the continual mismanagement of French finances and the individual Frenchman's reluctance

to pay his fair share of taxation?

Can we see England agreeing to any change in her monarchy, because of a majority against it among her Continental colleagues?

The way to further the ideal of greater European Unity is to advocate immediate practical steps by which greater co-operation between European countries can be achieved.

That is the line that has so far been taken by the International Committee for the Movements for European Union, and which was supported by the French and Belgian Governments in the modest proposals for a European Deliberative Assembly.

In Western Europe a complete pooling of military resources is being realised. Step by step main economic developments can be planned so as to achieve effective co-ordination of labour, plant, and materials.

This will enormously increase production and prosperity. But any Union that would gradually result could only be in a loose federation, with real autonomy for each of its members.

In fact, the British Empire is an ideal for such a future Union. It has no rigid written constitution. Every member is free to contract out. There is complete local autonomy that ensures respect for the historical background and customs of each member.

If the Europe of the future can achieve the same degree of unity as the British Empire, then European Union will have become a practical reality.

Yours, etc.,

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E. BEDDINGTON BEHRENS, Ph.D., M.C.