

Statement by Peter MacDonald to the House of Commons on the attitude of the British government regarding the Congress of Europe at The Hague (16 September 1948)

Caption: On 16 September 1948, the Conservative MP Sir Peter MacDonald, Member of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU), gives an address to the House of Commons in which he criticises the attitude adopted by the British Labour Government concerning the Congress of Europe in The Hague.

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Sir P. MacDonald:

[...]

When the Foreign Secretary was accused yesterday of trying to establish a Western Socialist Europe, he claimed that he had never made a statement to that effect. But what are the facts?

Let us go back, for instance, to The Hague Conference and see why the Government retreated from that very spontaneous gathering of people from all walks of life. It was by no means a political conference; it was a spontaneous conference of politicians, educationists, religious bodies, and women's organisations. Practically every phase of human life was represented there; the delegates were there to try to bring about, or to demonstrate their desire to bring about, the rehabilitation of a sick and war-scarred Europe.

What was the Government's response? They told us on more than one occasion that they were in favour of any organisation or body of people which had Western Union as their objective; they were in favour of such organisations taking whatever action they saw fit, and wished to encourage them. What encouragement did The Hague Conference get from the Government? The facts are that some Members of the Labour Party went to the Prime Minister and asked if it would be all right if they attended The Hague Conference. The Prime Minister told them that it was quite all right for them to do so. But when the rumour got around that my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) would probably be elected the honorary president of that conference, immediately action was taken not by the Government, but by Transport House. Meetings were called, letters were exchanged and those Members who had been told by the Prime Minister that it would be all right for them to attend this congress were informed that they must not go. In spite of that many of them, to their credit, did go to The Hague and took a useful part in that conference. That is one example of how little Government support Western Union gets when any manifestation of it takes place either in this country or outside unless approved by Transport House.

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