

The Political Committee

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_political_committee-en-ob7d16df-3aa0-4be4-a362-b81f52011307.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



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The drawing up of the final resolution of the Political Committee, chaired by the former President of the French Council of Ministers, Paul Ramadier, gave rise to lively and protracted debate.

In point of fact, almost half the participants in the Hague Congress were involved in the work of the Political Committee. It deliberated in the main hall of the *Dierentuin*, in the Botanical Gardens, and later at the *Ridderzaal*. Its bureau consisted, in addition to Ramadier, of two rapporteurs — the Conservative MP, Leslie Hale, and René Courtin, Delegate-General of the French Council for a United Europe — and two Secretaries — the former British Minister, Henry Hopkinson, and the French MP, André Noël. Finalised by René Courtin and Duncan Sandys, the President of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity (ICMEU), the draft resolution was subject to a large number of proposals for amendments prepared by a drafting committee and adopted or rejected by a show of hands. This sometimes involved the risk of ending up with a text based more or less on the lowest common denominator.

In contrast with the cohesive UK front, the French delegation, albeit large, lacked unity. Most of the French suggestions were thus rejected, in particular those put forward by Claude-Marcel Hytte, editor of *La République Moderne*, which were thought to be too corporatist in nature, and by the French lawyer, Claude Lussan, who proposed that a proportion of the members of the European Assembly be designated by representative bodies such as the trade unions. Other particularly noteworthy interventions in the Political Committee included those of André François-Poncet, French Ambassador, and Jean Drapier, Deputy Head of Cabinet to Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Prime Minister, on the involvement of Germany, and those of the Labour MP Ronald Mackay and his Conservative counterpart, Harold Macmillan, in favour of an Assembly elected by the national parliaments. The Political Committee's deliberations also provided an opportunity for the observers from Central and Eastern Europe and Spain to express their attachment to the European cause and assert their wish to take part in the unification of Europe. The need to introduce a European passport and create a European Affairs Ministry in every country was another issue raised, along with the need to associate with the proposed united Europe the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), the colonies of some European nations. Some Congress participants disagreed on how a democratic regime should be defined. Others advocated the establishment of an Extraordinary Council of Europe consisting of government representatives. With regard to the drawing up of a Charter of Human Rights, a number of speakers emphasised the specifically European understanding of relations between the citizen and the state. They were, therefore, opposed to the idea that a united Europe should confine itself to adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the UN was drawing up at that time.

But the proposal that would create the greatest stir was the one put forward by Paul Reynaud, the former President of the French Council of Ministers. Backed by Édouard Bonnefous, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the French National Assembly, he sought, in an audacious proposal, to argue that the members of the future European Assembly should be elected not by national MPs but directly by the people. He saw this as the best way of generating public interest in European issues. He further proposed that MPs in favour of European unity should act immediately to table bills in their respective parliaments whereby, in the countries concerned, the election of representatives to the European Assembly should be undertaken on the basis of one representative for every one million inhabitants. In March 1948, Reynaud and Bonnefous had already tabled a draft resolution in the National Assembly inviting the French Government to engage, without delay, in negotiations with the various European countries with a view to the convening of a European Constituent Assembly. But in The Hague, Paul Reynaud's proposal produced sharp reactions from Congress participants of a pro-union persuasion and from the representatives of the small countries who were worried that a majority of seats in the European Assembly would be earmarked for the great powers. After many hours of discussion, a majority was secured in the Political Committee to reject what was regarded as too radical an approach. The participants had, no doubt, come to realise that European unity could be achieved only with the support of the national governments and parliaments; hence the need to adopt a more moderate recommendation.

The text of the resolution, adopted unanimously by the Political Committee during the night of 9 to 10 May, was presented the next morning by Ramadier at a plenary session chaired by the Conservative MP and

former British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. It was ratified unanimously by the Congress. It stated in particular that:

— the time has come when the European nations must transfer and merge some portion of their sovereign rights;

— a European Assembly chosen by the Parliaments, from among their members or others, should be convened as a matter of real urgency;

— a Commission should undertake immediately the task of drafting a Charter of Human Rights and of laying down the standards to which a State must conform if it is to be deemed a democracy;

— a Court of Justice should enforce the Charter;

— the Union or Federation of Europe (the text leaves this point open) would not be directed against any nation.