

'Where is Christian Democracy heading?' from Le Monde (30 April 1947)

Caption: On 30 April 1957, the French daily newspaper Le Monde reports on the 11th Congress of the Nouvelles équipes internationales (NEI) in Arezzo and in Rome and analyses the political objectives of Christian Democracy.

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After the Congress of the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales*

Where is Christian Democracy heading?

From our special correspondent
Jacques Fauvet

Rome, 29 April. — The 11th Congress of the transnational federalist group *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* (NEI), which began on Wednesday in Arezzo, Tuscany, came to an end on Sunday in Rome. It was held in a country where lively and, indeed, vigorous Christian Democracy, unanimously supported by the clergy, finds itself confronted by a large and dynamic Communist Party, backed by most Socialists. This situation is not repeated elsewhere; it gives Italian Christian Democracy its simultaneously aggressive and denominational character. Communists hardly have a look-in in Belgium or Germany, where in fact Catholics and Protestants work together within the CDU [German Christian Democratic Union]. In France, meanwhile, the MRP [Popular Republican Movement] has much less electoral and, may we say, clerical support than similar groups in other European countries; moreover, it has not been the main non-Communist group since 1945-1946.

Yet today, whatever their situation, all Christian Democrats share one conviction. While they are not alone in wanting to fight Communism on the welfare front, they are alone in their ability to provide an ideological counter-attack, because only they can offer, as Communism does, a simple and complete explanation of mankind, society and history. The void left by the decline of the purely idealistic doctrines of the previous century and then by the fall of the authoritarian regimes has finally convinced them that the Communist myth can be replaced only by the Christian message. Indeed, this was the leitmotif of the Congress.

This statement entails a risk and an obligation. The danger, as we have already said, takes the shape of domestic and foreign clericalism. The French are more aware of this than the Germans, who are, however, more aware than the Italians.

In terms of social justice, the motion before the Congress made reference only to those ‘who are conscious of their responsibilities before God’, as emphasised by Mr Coste-Floret. Moreover, the delegates noted that the papal address was formulated in general terms and did not enable a denominational seal to be bestowed upon the NEI. However, this may change.

Communism is not only a political movement: it comprises a philosophy and sometimes imitates a religion. Christianity is above all a faith, but it involves the metaphysical and may inspire policy. The overlapping of the spiritual and the secular in this way may be found at the beginning and the end of the development of the two doctrines. However, the involvement of a Catholic party as such entails the risk that those who reject the Christian message are pushed towards Communism or that they are simply suspended in a fearful limbo, as already appears to be the case in Italy.

This risk may be eliminated if the Christian Democrats satisfy one, or rather two, obligations. The first is to consider doctrine as defining the sense of their personal involvement and not as setting out the agenda of one party opposed to another party, even if this is the Communist Party. The difference in attitude that results from this could be summarised by saying that they must react *in a Christian way* and not *as Christians*. This in no way precludes them from coming together, either at home or internationally, to exchange their points of view and their experiences, to define a general direction, and even to discuss the ways in which they may differ.

The second obligation is precisely to translate their ideals into acts and institutions; should this not happen, the Christian doctrine would constitute a moral alibi or an intellectual comfort. It is not enough to possess the truth, as was often said during the Congress: it must be used to improve the human condition. This is why the Congress has once again spoken in favour of social reforms and supported the ‘reformism’ proposed by Mr Pella. However, we cannot see that the fate of mankind or the structure of society have changed very much in countries where Christian Democracy has held or shared power over the past

10 years. Why and how should things be remedied? This should logically be the theme of the next congress, to be held in The Hague.

Mr Auguste De Schrijver, Belgian Minister without portfolio, is NEI President; Mr Alfred Coste-Floret, Member of the French Parliament for Haute-Garonne, is Secretary-General. And yet, the Belgian Christian Social Party and the MRP are not organically represented in the NEI, whereas the Christian Democrats from Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands are so represented. Delegates do not officially involve their party.

The reasons behind the MRP's decision are less valid today than in 1946-1947. A smaller party than before, it has less reason to fear close collaboration with other Christian Democratic parties. Those who are still loyal to the MRP will understand its decision. The MRP may warn the other Christian Democratic parties against domestic and foreign, or indeed European, clericalism. It is well placed to remind them that, if civilisation and the old continent are partly de-Christianised, it is not the duty of politics but the duty of religion to re-Christianise them. In exchange, the other parties may teach the MRP a sense of commitment and organisation, in other words, a sense of political struggle, and not just parliamentary and electoral competition.

In conclusion, it has become evident at Congress meetings that a party should not fear divided opinion during debate, as long as the party remains united in action, once the decision has been taken. This is also one of the lessons of the NEI Congress.