

'The Montreux Conferences' from Le Monde (4 September 1947)

Caption: On 4 September 1947, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the debates held in Montreux by the federalist movements and singles out the differences in approach taken by the world federalists and the Union of European Federalists (UEF).

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Towards global federalism

The Montreux Conferences

Two conferences have just taken place in that sheltered corner of the world known as the Upper Lake Geneva Region: one was a meeting of the world's federalists, the other an assembly of the European Union of Federalists. Although the two groups share the same ideals, the same faith nurtured by an identical culture and almost indistinguishable aims, the meetings each had their own atmosphere and very distinctive character.

The 'internationalist' conference began first, held in the splendid College Conference Hall, perched high up with its enormous windows open both night and day. For the first time in history, the sons of Wisconsin and Tennessee met the heirs of Rome and Gaul to create a single government. The Scandinavians, the Swiss and the Austrians were also represented, however, and a delegate for 'displaced persons', whose plight is particularly painful, attended in order to maintain the dignity of the stateless. The one cause for regret, perhaps, was that South America was not represented. Whether it was the heat, the influence of the Americans or merely the youthfulness of the delegates, few jackets and ties were in evidence in the Conference Hall; several delegates actually wore shorts, and arms were bare or with sleeves rolled up — even among the eminent representatives of the Westminster Parliament. As far as the internationalists are concerned, the issue is simple, basic even: throughout the world, mankind struggles, hungers, suffers, loves and dies — or is killed. Why do individual governments try to oppose a brotherhood of man, to satisfy one human being at the expense of another, to protect the one, but not the other? One world, one human race and, logically, therefore, one government.

During the weeklong session of meetings, the likes of which had never been seen before, there may have been a day or two of uncertainty and one or two procedural inefficiencies at the outset, but there then followed five days of productive effort. As a result of these talks, these confrontations and this intermingling of ideas, a competitive spirit arose which will surely bear fruit during the coming winter. A further outcome of the conferences was a resolution put to all nations, proposed by the British and carried unanimously, calling for a World Constituent Assembly to be held in Geneva in 1950. There also emerged a hope of reforming the UN, a hope which remains so dear to the Americans.

The 'Conference of the Europeans' was held during the following week. This was, perhaps, a more orderly affair, its preparation more meticulous, and the setting of the Montreux Palace rather more luxurious, if somewhat restricting. Here the atmosphere of debate was subdued, the delegates were correctly attired, their faces wore serious expressions and everything bore testimony to the traditions, cultures and tribulations of old Europe — a Europe keen to remain as it always had been. It might have been described as a small patrician senate. Now and then, eminent persons filled the Conference Hall, where the occasional whiff of former prestige was evident. Although the Europeans are also moving in the direction of a single government, they nonetheless continue to uphold the virtue of a European stage. One can hardly blame them, when one thinks back to how America failed to keep President Wilson's promises in 1920 and if one bears in mind the fact that the possibility of the United States adopting an isolationist approach still remains. There is also the feeling, however, that, faced with the collapse of the concept of nationalism, a concept of continentalism is being born. Certain aspects of this border on the chauvinistic, particularly amongst those people who are quite ready to believe that 'one still feels more at home among Europeans'. Some people believe that it is perhaps a little late to limit federalist values to Europe, yet there are others who would regard this as a quite magnificent result. Nevertheless, special committees have begun working much more quickly than is the case with the internationalists, and, in this area too, Europe is undergoing a dramatic evolution.

Away from the two conferences, important contacts have been established between delegates hitherto separated by a gulf which seemed impossible to bridge; genuine friendships have been formed. Lectures given by eminent specialists, many of them French, have been enthusiastically received, and one Frenchman, Jean Larmeroux, having a fundamental attachment to both movements, secured almost unanimous support in his bid for the Presidency of the World Movement for an International Confederation

(i.e. from an internationalist perspective).

The multiple and extensive repercussions of the two assemblies will certainly be felt during the coming year. A large amount of seed has been sown in Montreux, and it has been sown in a spirit of generosity, intelligence and goodwill. This seed will eventually bear fruit.

Diedisheim