

Address given by Ronald William Gordon Mackay (Gstaad, 8 September 1947)

Caption: In his address to the inaugural Congress of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU), Ronald W. G. Mackay, a British MP and Vice-President of the EPU, outlines the unsuccessful attempts made hitherto to achieve European unity and calls on MPs in Europe to work towards a federation of the countries of Western Europe.

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Opening Address by R. W. G. Mackay, M.P., Vice President of the European Parliamentary Union (Gstaad, 8 September 1947)

It is fitting that the first meeting of representatives from the different Parliaments of Europe, convened for the purpose of establishing machinery to create a Federation of Western Europe, should be held in Gstaad, Switzerland, whose country and Constitution offer so much guidance to the work which has to be done. To those who argue the impossibility of establishing a European Federation on the ground of race, language and nationality, Switzerland represents the complete example of what can be done with different races, languages and nationalities. To those who feel that the centuries of growth during which the peoples of Europe have established their independence render it difficult for them to give up their sovereignty, the Constitution of the Swiss Federation, which retains as it does the national characteristics of the States and gives only small but very definite and adequate defined powers to the Federal Authority, is again an outstanding example of how such a political machinery can be devised. Finally, as the country is situated in the centre of Europe which has seen so much of the activity of this century to secure some kind of world order, it is again fitting that we should be meeting here for the purpose of initiating, not a system of Government for the world, but a system of Government for the most important region or continent of the world, the continent of Europe.

I think it very important that at the outset we should be clear as to what we are doing. All of us are democrats, anxious to see the extension and development of the democratic idea, and we have seen in the last two centuries a large amount of progress in political and economic thought from the ideas of the French Revolution in the eighteenth century and the Russian Revolution in the twentieth. We should be foolish if, in attending to the tasks which confront us in the next few days, we didn't realise that the society in which we are living is drawing a lot from both Revolutions. Democracy is not a possession to be enjoyed but a kingdom which has to be won, and it is unstable if it is merely, as many of us used to think, a machinery of Government, a political system and nothing more, instead of being, as it should be, a system in keeping with the ideas on which it is based, social equality and equality of opportunity. We must, in other words, distinguish between democracy as a form of Government and democracy as a society. It may be that in Russia, where there is not a democratic Government, as the term is understood in the West, there may be a democratic society of an extent which has not been realised in other European countries or even in the United States of America.

But democracy is not only a question of the form of Government, the method of representation, the freedom and toleration which is permitted to the individual citizens, nor only an economic society in which the principles of freedom and equality are applied. For any form of Government will be unstable if the area over which it extends is too small. If the history of the twenty years between the wars teaches us anything it is, as Mr. Chamberlain and Marshal Stalin have both said, that the day of the small State has gone, and a continent of Europe divided into twenty-six independent sovereign States, however democratic they may be, is a continent which is unstable in its method of political organisation and a natural fire-trap for the whole world. We should not have needed the rise of Hitler and the conflict in Europe to teach us that each of the States of Europe between the wars were incapable of solving their own economic and political problems on their own; that the economic nationalism which grew up between the wars was the natural development of the economic unstable characteristic of each country of Europe, which resulted from their failure to realise their economic interdependence. It is this third aspect of democracy with which we are concerned today. The extension of the area of government beyond the boundaries of national States and over wider areas of economic resources than the individual countries of Europe, is the third aspect of democracy to which we must apply our minds and devote our attention during the next few days. But it is the most important. The United States of America has a Government over territory as large as Europe, and whatever its political social form takes now or in the future, however unstable it may be as a result of its economic organisation, there is at least one Government operating over a wide field for a large number of people, and what is true of America is true of the U.S.S.R. It is not true of Europe, a continent which has greater resources than those of the U.S.A. or those of the U.S.S.R., a larger population, a greater tradition and enormous skill and craftsmanship. It is in this continent that since the days of the Industrial Revolution the whole economic development has been towards the unity of Europe, while its political development, guided by the sharp edge of sovereign State has been towards splitting the continent into sixteen countries in 1875, 22 in 1914

and 28 today.

In the deliberations about a Federation of Europe, or of Western Europe, it is I think important that we keep clearly in our minds some of the things we are attempting to secure. In the form of organisation which was created after the first world war, the League of Nations, there were three great faults. The first was that it was a world-wide organisation which, noble in its conception, threw obligations on to individual States much greater than they could bear. No system of government will ever be successful where responsibility is thrown on individuals or States greater than they can bear, and the attempt to create world organisation in 1919, like the same attempt at Dumbarton Oaks with the United Nations Charter, was bound to fail, and this one is bound to fail, for the very reason that the peoples of the world have not yet worked out their own form of government and are not ready to come together in a world-wide system. The Americans are working out their own salvation in their own way. The Russians are doing the same. There is no common basis of agreement between them as to the economic policy which they should follow. Europe, likewise, has a contribution to make and must build up her own political and economic organisation without having regard necessarily to the social and political systems of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. And what is being said of Europe equally applies to China, India, Africa and South America. The one-world conception is therefore completely premature. It was completely premature in 1919 and it still is today, and unless we get this clearly into our minds our thought will be confused. We are concerned to create a regional political organisation for Europe. In the second place the League conception, and it applies equally to the Charter of the United Nations, failed to realise that the strength of any government is in power. Politics is the problem of power and a government exercises power, and without power it is a useless government. The United Nations Charter like the League has no power, and it was the failure in this sense that led to its failures in Abyssinia and in the other conflicts between the two wars. Unless you have a government, which having got its direction from Parliament, has executive power and authority, you are just playing at the whole conception. The Governments of Holland, France, America, Switzerland, have power. They can exercise authority; they can make decisions and have effect given to them. This is the difference between the conception of the United Nations and the Federal conception. Just as the Government of the United States of America, drawing its sanctions and its authority from its Constitution, can exercise power over the people of its country, so too must we create in Europe a democratic and parliamentary authority which can exercise power within the restricted limits given to it by its Constitution over the people of Europe. We must recognise that government cannot be static, that we are not looking for security and peace, that life is a struggle and that the whole history of European development is a history of struggle and social change. No government is of any value unless it is able to deal with the changing requirements of the people from decade to decade and from generation to generation. The League of Nations wanted to confirm the status quo in 1920, the United Nations desires to do the same today. But we want in Europe not an authority which is going to confirm the status quo but a flexible government based on a Parliament which from time to time will reflect the changing views of the people of Europe, and in consequence modify and extend the social, political and economic institutions of European society. May I remind you that we have a Socialist Government in Britain today, or coming nearer home, may I remind you that the Swiss Constitution of 1874 was very different from that of 1848. It is essential therefore that any Constitution which is discussed for Europe should be adequate in its powers to deal with the social and economic problems which confront Europe as a whole. We live in a world of planning and social change and one of the purposes of a European Federation is to be able to have the problems of Europe dealt with as a whole by one authority instead of sixteen or twenty-eight.

We have recently seen that the whole conception of one world, be it politically as shown at Lake Success, with the veto, or economically, the attempt to return to multi-lateral trade has completely broken down. The Marshall Plan for Europe will serve the Europeans no purpose if it results only in the creation of a shopping list to be used in spending American dollars. That help is necessary from the Western world both in food and in machinery need not be argued. What is more necessary is a realisation that an economic framework must be created by the States now meeting in Paris, so that they can really integrate the economies of the European States. One has only to mention the need of an economic structure in order to realise the necessity for a political structure as well. The first could not function without the second. When we look at the European picture we realise what enormous opportunity there is. Europe, even those parts of Europe now represented at Paris by the sixteen States, has greater resources than the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R. Before the

war it was doing seven-tenths of the world's trade in manufactures. Even if you exclude the European States from the figures of world trade and treat Western Europe as a single State, Europe still does more than one-third of the world's trade and it has a population larger than the other two big federations. Despite the devastation of two wars there is no reason why Europe shouldn't become one of the most prosperous and stable regions in the world, and it has a culture and a political experience and development which is equalled by no other continent.

I have not gone into the details of the Constitution which you are meeting here to consider, and the steps which have to be taken to secure its support by the different States. Needless to remark it must be a democratic Constitution drawing its authority from the people of Europe. Again, it must leave the individual States to carry on their development and their own tradition and culture to the very fullest extent. This means that the Federal Government must have express powers, carefully defined, as are those of the Swiss Constitution. But there are three things which I would like to say and make very clear. The first is that this must be something more than a regional organisation within the United Nations. If a Federation of Western Europe is to be created from the States of Western Europe then those States must cease to be members of the United Nations, the member State becoming Western Europe. This means that Britain and France will cease to be members of the United Nations and will participate in its activities only as parts of Western Europe, as California does as part of the U.S.A. This point is fundamental for otherwise we will do little more than discuss proposals as vague and as indefinite as those provided in the discussions on the Briand Plan. Secondly, Great Britain must be a member State and must face its responsibilities to Western Europe and acknowledge that the time for a change in the position of the British Commonwealth of Nations has arrived. The British Commonwealth cannot continue as a political or economic entity in the modern world. Canada's development is with the U.S.A. Britain, as recent events have shown, can only survive the change in her position as a State in the world by merging her interests with those of the States of Western Europe in a European Federation. Finally, and this is as important as anything that one can say, the European Federation must grow up in friendly relationship with the U.S.S.R., determined from the beginning to co-operate and work with that great power in common ends. Any suggestion of a European bloc either to resist Communism or to resist the U.S.S.R. would ruin the aims which we all have at the start, and would only ultimately plunge the world into another great war. The Russians have organised themselves in a big federation conceived out of their own geographical and historical past. Europe is quite entitled to create for herself another federation based on her past, her traditions and her political experience. But these two federations must approach their common problems together and must agree to iron out any questions which might create difficulties between them.

We have seen in the past many attempts to unify Europe by force. Napoleon and Hitler both failed to secure for any time the unity of Europe. The great task now lies with this generation, a task greater than any given to any previous generation, of seeing that the unity of Europe, without which there can be no world peace and no world order, is brought about by the common consent of the peoples of Europe. And it is right that you should all resolve to devote your activities, your intelligence and your goodwill to secure the realisation of that great aim.