

'From utopia to reality' from Le Soir (19 May 1979)

Caption: On 19 May 1979, in an article published by the daily newspaper Le Soir, the Belgian Socialist MP, Hervé Brouhon, welcomes the forthcoming first elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, emphasising the importance of these elections for his party.

Source: Le Soir. 19.05.1979, n° 116; 93e année. Bruxelles: Rossel S.A. "De l'utopie à la réalité", auteur:Brouhon, Hervé , p. 1.

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From utopia to reality

On 10 June, my daughter Huguette will vote for the first time.

‘Is it not strange,’ she said to me the other evening, ‘that I am not allowed to elect Members of Parliament and Senators in my own country when I can vote for Members of the European Parliament?’ Then, having thought for a moment, she added: ‘But I think that it is really good that my first vote is for Europe. It seems symbolic. My future and the future of the younger generations is going to depend on Europe, is it not?’

So, for young people who, like Huguette, have turned 18 since the 1976 local elections, the ballot on 10 June will have a special meaning. It will be here that they make the transition to full-fledged citizenship. As circumstances would have it in Huguette’s case, it will be European citizenship.

10 June will also be a very special date for all those who have waged a longer than three-decade campaign for the establishment of democratic institutions that can deliver a common economic and social policy for those European countries that desire it. Such institutions would have an authority surpassing national borders, anchored in an economically and socially strong Community capable of ensuring that our ‘old’ continent continues to play its essential role of protecting its peoples’ futures against today’s superpowers, namely the United States, the USSR and China.

It seemed an unthinkable, utopian enterprise when it began.

How to unite peoples with their own traditions and national characteristics? Peoples with different cultures, who had been constantly conditioned to believe that their interests diverged from those of others? Yet peoples with a common denominator: all had suffered, throughout their history, from wars that had set one against another and for which all had paid a terrible price.

And the unthinkable was made possible, and the utopian became reality.

The European Community is alive and functioning.

Admittedly, it does not, in its current form, fulfil all of our aspirations.

Far from it!

Its institutions are too technocratic and lack the necessary resources to overcome the crises and challenges that Europe faces. They have little contact with the public and are not subject to any real parliamentary scrutiny.

This is why the European parliamentary election, with its universal suffrage, assumes such importance. From 10 June, things will never be the same again. The Members of the European Parliament will be directly accountable for the positions which they adopt to the electorate that they represent, and the opinions of a Parliament elected by universal suffrage will have much greater weight than those of the current forum, consisting of delegates from nine national parliaments.

Which explains the choice made by the Socialist Party in drawing up its list of candidates. We have chosen to put forward women and men who will serve their full term of office and will not resign a few days or weeks after their election. Women and men who will struggle to build a Europe that truly serves its citizens, that does not hesitate to involve them in building a fairer, more caring, more progressive society.

Socialism is the lofty ideal and the great popular force that can bring a new eternal life-force to Europe. A future of freedom.

Hervé Brouhon,
Chairman of the Socialist Group of the House