

'An important new beginning' from Le Populaire (8 August 1949)

Caption: On 8 August 1949, Léon Blum, founder of the French Socialist daily newspaper Le Populaire, expresses his enthusiasm following the creation of the Council of Europe, placing particular emphasis on the role that European Socialism will play in the work of the future Assembly.

Source: Le Populaire. 08.09.1949. Paris: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). "Un grand commencement", auteur:Blum, Léon.

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An important new beginning

I am among those who felt moved by a great wave of hope and faith when, thirty years ago, President Wilson declared to the world that the reward for victory over the Central Empires would be peace. Peace founded on liberty, justice and solidarity. Peace guaranteed by the International Order.

I am among those who, after the Treaty of Versailles, made fervent efforts to back the League of Nations in the mind of the peoples, to inspire it in their minds with the confidence and the resolve that drives individual nations, and to extract from it a true international community, capable of making and imposing law among States as well as among men.

I am among those who, during the last war, after the appalling periods of shame and distress, felt my betrayed hope and my disappointed faith revived as the radio brought news of a fresh wind of peace — the Atlantic Charter and the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals — when, for the second time, they were able to promise themselves, as the objective and the spoils of war, as the fruit of victory, the uniting of men, nations and States in brotherhood, justice and peace. I received this message through the bars of a prison that I thought I would never leave alive. Nobody could have received it with more jubilation, more enthusiasm or more joy. Everything seemed transformed. It seemed that 25 years of my life had finally been justified and recompensed.

I know that, since the Liberation, neither France nor Europe, nor indeed the world, has united in the way we dreamt that it would when we were defeated or that we pictured that it would when we were victorious. It is now more than four years since the totalitarian dictatorships of the Axis were crushed, and the world is still not at peace, it is still haunted by nightmares. But what is four years in the history of mankind? Are we so sure that these years have been wasted? Behind the acts of men, their errors, their disappointments, flows the force of circumstance, the force of ideas, working independently. It subconsciously enters the consciousness of individuals and nations. We are unaware of its progress simply because it remains imperceptible to us until it reveals itself through the effects that it has. Despite everything, two great wars, two great victories, have compelled individuals, nations, and even States, to recognise that peace cannot result from war or victory. The world will sleep peacefully, live peacefully, only when order, based on justice and brotherhood, is established on an international scale.

Needless to say with what enthusiasm I shall follow the Strasbourg meeting, with what enthusiasm I shall follow the debates there. I see it as, I want to see it as, one of the great beginnings, or, if you will, one of the great new beginnings of history. I wish with all my heart, with all my soul, that it will stand as one of the cardinal dates which mark and measure human progress.

The Strasbourg Assembly is meeting to the sound of arms, and this may appear a paradox, a mockery. Quite the reverse is true, however. The circumstances are favourable. Individuals and States have courage enough for peace only when they feel the threat of war hanging over them. May the Strasbourg delegates take courage from it. I do not counsel them to be cautious or sensible, to use the old familiar, tried and tested techniques. I counsel them to be daring and even reckless. I counsel the heroic imprudence which inspires enthusiasm, for they can achieve anything with the enthusiasm of the nations involved and can achieve nothing without it. All new beginnings in human evolution are breaks in continuity, a risky anticipation of the future similar to the ‘mutations’ of living species. They are adventures, revolutionary adventures, and the major transformations of humanity, whatever their nature, have always been made in this way.

This is one of the reasons which ought to ensure that the Socialist delegations play a major role at the Strasbourg Assembly. European Socialism has already held an important, indeed, at various points, a dominant position in the planning of the Assembly. How can it fail to hold the same position in these discussions, when the programme and the aim of the Assembly coincide to such a degree with the doctrine and the policies of International Socialism, when Socialism is the source of this revolutionary fervour and of this revolutionary confidence which forms the initial and final requirement for success!