

'Towards Union' from The Daily Telegraph (23 August 1948)

Caption: On 23 August 1948, the British daily newspaper The Daily Telegraph hopes to see Clement Attlee's Labour Government support the French proposal to establish a European Assembly.

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Towards Union

When Mr. CHURCHILL and an influential all-party deputation selected from British representatives at The Hague Congress of Europe met the Prime Minister in June, Mr. ATTLEE undertook to examine in company with Mr. BEVIN the Congress resolutions "and in particular the proposal for the convening of a European Assembly." The Berlin blockade was proclaimed just 24 hours after Mr. ATTLEE and Mr. BEVIN received this deputation, and they have since had plenty of other matters to think about. Now, however, the project of a European Assembly has come up again, not as the proposal of an unofficial though important British group, but as a definite recommendation from the new French Government. It does not appear that the French Cabinet is committed to the detailed memorandum drawn up after The Hague Congress, but it has "agreed to use its influence with the Governments concerned in favour of the principal points." This approach cannot be ignored by our own Government, particularly when M. SPAAK, the Belgian Premier, has expressed himself in favour of the French initiative.

The scheme as it stands for discussion at this stage is that a small constituent body nominated by the respective Parliaments, but not necessarily drawn from M.P.s, should meet fairly soon and discuss the organisation of a wider European Assembly. Supposing the delegates can agree on a plan acceptable to their respective Governments, the five countries concerned will then invite all the 19 signatory Powers represented on the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation to meet in the European Assembly, which would have for the present neither legislative nor executive powers. Such an Assembly, in fact, could be nothing more at the start than a distinguished debating society—as was The Hague Congress. But it would be in a position to make recommendations which would carry the more weight since the constitution of the Assembly, however powerless, would bear the moral authority of the participating Governments.

There are obvious arguments which may persuade the British Government to snub these proposals, as they snubbed The Hague Congress. Mr. DALTON and the narrower minds of the British Socialist party resent, as they made it clear in their attitude to The Hague Congress, any gathering of Europeans which includes non-Socialists. Our "Empire Crusaders" proclaim it treason to the British Commonwealth whenever it is pointed out that there is a Continent near our own Islands and that we have many interests in common with the peoples who live there. If Mr. ATTLEE and Mr. BEVIN accept the French invitation they will also meet less biased criticisms from cautious folk who fear that once we begin talking of an Assembly of Europeans we are half way to a scheme of regional federations by rival continents. Yet despite all these objections it is much to be hoped that the French invitation will be courteously accepted. For far too long the ordinary man here and on the Continent has been led to think almost exclusively in national terms. However far we stand from a full European Union, the first step must be to popularise the truth that we are all Europeans. A European Assembly, provided its immediate aims are not too ambitious, seems an excellent starting place on that road.