

'European Assembly: Mr. Attlee's view' from The Daily Telegraph (26 August 1948)

Caption: On 26 August 1948, the British daily newspaper The Daily Telegraph reports the reply of Clement Attlee, British Prime Minister, to Winston Churchill, President of the United Europe Movement, concerning the establishment of a European Assembly. Attlee believes that the British Government cannot rule on the question without first having consulted the leaders of the Commonwealth countries.

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European Assembly: Mr. Attlee's view

EMPIRE TO BE CONSULTED

REPLY TO MR. CHURCHILL

BY A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The British Government will not express any definite view on The Hague Congress proposal to call a European Assembly until it has been discussed by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in October.

This decision is made known by the publication, last night, of correspondence between Mr. Attlee and Mr. Churchill, who is president of the United Europe Movement.

With the letters is issued a paper prepared by an all-party group of members of the British delegation to The Hague meetings in May. Mr. Churchill sent a copy of the paper, which includes a proposal to convene a European Assembly "as a matter of real urgency," to Mr. Attlee on July 27.

He also enclosed a draft resolution approved by the International Committee for the Co-ordination of Movements for Western Union, to be submitted to the various Parliaments concerned.

"NOT RIGHT TIME"

To Mr. Churchill's suggestion that a lead should be taken by Britain, Mr. Attlee replied on July 30, that although he was in sympathy with the basic idea behind the Movement, he did not see how the Government could support the resolution. Convening an Assembly was a matter for Governments, not independent organisations or Parliaments.

The Prime Minister added that he thought it was not the right time for Governments to take the major initiative "when their hands are so full already with urgent and difficult problems."

Meantime, on Aug. 19, the French Government took the lead. It proposed that the five Western nations [Britain, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg] bound by the Brussels Pact should join in setting up the nucleus of a Parliament of Europe. A conference in Brussels, not later than November, was suggested.

M. Spaak, the Belgian Prime Minister, lent the weight of his authority to the move. M. Bech, the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, also expressed his support.

Two days after the French Government's announcement, Mr. Churchill wrote again to Mr. Attlee:

CHARTWELL,
WESTERHAM, KENT,
AUG. 21, 1948.

My Dear Prime Minister.

We were naturally disappointed to receive your letter of July 30, because of its negative character. I thought it wise to delay its publication until you had returned from your well-deserved holiday in the hopes that events in Europe might win a more favourable reply.

Now that M. Spaak has made his important pronouncement and that the French Government have not only adopted the policy, but officially propose a practical form of action, I venture to hope that his Majesty's Government will find it possible to place themselves more in line with Western European opinions upon an issue which they themselves have already done much to promote.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

Mr. Attlee replied the same day, saying the whole question had an important bearing on Commonwealth relations. Following is the text of the letter:

10, DOWNING-STREET.

21st August, 1948.

My Dear Churchill,

I have now received your further letter of the 21st August. I note that you now desire that publication should be given to the correspondence which has passed between us about the proposal to convene a European Assembly.

According to Press reports, the French Government intend to raise the matter in the first instance with the Brussels Treaty Powers, and in that event the issue will probably be placed on the agenda of the Brussels Treaty Permanent Commission very shortly. If you consider that in these circumstances the present is a suitable moment at which to publish our correspondence, I should not wish to dissuade you.

I should, however, tell you that when M. Bidault [then French Foreign Minister] raised the question of a European Assembly at the meeting of the Brussels Treaty Consultative Council at The Hague on July 20, the Foreign Secretary replied that he could not for the time being commit himself, and there was general agreement that M. Bidault's statement should be given further consideration by the five Governments.

In adopting this line the Foreign Secretary took into account the circumstance that the whole question has an important bearing on Commonwealth relations, and that in consequence the Government desire to exchange views with the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in October before expressing any definite view.

But this consideration need not affect the work of independent organisations, which, as I suggested in my previous letter, could profitably continue to prepare the ground for European Union.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) C. R. Attlee.

Democracies only

The draft resolution referred to states that the Parliament concerned is of opinion that: A European Assembly should be convened as soon as possible; it should be composed of representatives of the countries, including Western Germany, participating in the European Recovery Programme.

The aims of the European Assembly would be to formulate plans for the economic and political union or federation of Europe. It would not encroach in any way on the authority of national Parliaments.

In their note stressing these points the members of the British delegation to The Hague Congress suggest that the Assembly must be limited to the European democracies. On a suggested basis of two representatives for every million of the populations, the Assembly would have about 500 members.