Can Europe Unite?

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CAN EUROPE UNITE?

THE opening of the twelfth Assembly of the League of Nations also marks the second anniversary of the launching of the idea of a United States of Europe. It may be safely asserted that among the projects devised since the war for the cure of Europe's ills, none has received greater attention or more serious consideration than the idea of a federal union of European states as conceived by M. Briand. In some quarters it has been received with enthusiasm, in others with skepticism; but in either case, this possibility of salvaging the Old World from the grave crises which hold the whole continent in their grip, was from its inception subject to a close analysis on the part of all interested governments. Witness to this the replies of the European governments to the French memorandum of May 1, 1930, in which the guiding principles for such a federation were set forth.

Besides governments, public opinion also is deeply interested in this plan; and students of political science have followed its course with close attention. It may now be appropriate to consider the intrinsic value of this project in the light of its two years' history and to inquire whither the path on which Europe then entered in seeking the solution of her troubles is likely to lead, and whether the methods chosen are conducive to the end sought for. Such an inquiry seems to be particularly timely and justified by the anxiety with which the turn of affairs in Europe is generally regarded, an anxiety which increases proportionately with the gravity of the crises—economic, political, social and, perhaps above all, mental and moral. How grave and substantial the reasons for this anxiety must be is best proved by the fact that they have induced the government of the United States to take an active hand in the adjustment of Europe's troubled economic conditions in spite of the policy of aloofness which this government has heretofore adopted toward European affairs since the repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles.

It is indeed difficult to estimate the value of the plan of a European federal union on the face of the record. The realization of a union among European states is admittedly a most difficult thing. It must be approached with utmost care and caution. The procedure must be exceedingly slow. The two years which have elapsed since M. Briand submitted his plan to an assemblage of the representatives of twenty-seven European governments, members of the League of Nations, cannot be considered in any way sufficient to produce tangible results.

Such results are indeed meager. The European Committee, called into being by an Assembly resolution of September 17, 1930, and formally constituted as the "Committee of Enquiry on the European Union" on September 23, 1930, has held three sessions altogether. The first formal session merely elected M. Briand as President, and—in order to demonstrate the intimate connection of the proposed organization with the League of Nations—Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretary General of the League, as Secretary. The two subsequent sessions, held in January and May, 1931, respectively, were largely occupied with questions of organization and procedure, and rather general discussion of problems which would call for consideration. The only positive step taken thus far by the committee was the appointment, at the January session, of a subcommittee for the study of the agricultural crisis in central and southeastern Europe. This subcommittee prepared, on the basis of a careful study of the problem, and with the help of the Financial Section of the League Secretariat, a draft convention for the establishment of an international institute for agricultural credits. The convention was actually signed by thirteen states before the adjournment of the committee's May session and it may be hoped that its operation will bring at least partial relief to the disastrous agricultural depression which seriously threatens the economic structure of the whole of southeastern Europe.

It should, perhaps, be regarded as another positive step that the European states not members of the League of Nations (Russia, Turkey and Iceland) were also invited to the com-

mittee's last session and were permitted to participate in the discussions on a more or less equal footing.

Here, however, the record of constructive achievement ends. Although the very able and profound theoretical discussions of organization and procedure were important in the development of mental attitudes, the time spent upon them was disappointing and disproportionate in view of the urgent demands for the solution of practical problems facing Europe.

It may well be questioned whether there are handicaps inherent in this scheme of a federal union, or in the line of approach suggested in the French memorandum of May 1, 1930, apart from the admitted difficulties inherent in the state of affairs of Europe—handicaps which may explain the rather meager progress made toward the realization of this project. For both the replies of the European governments to the French memorandum and the discussions which took place in the committee indicate that the statesmen there present were aware of the gravity of the situation, saw the precipice toward which Europe is going and realized the necessity of concerted action. It seems, therefore, appropriate to seek the causes of this alarmingly slow progress not so much in the purpose of the scheme, which, although difficult to realize, is by no means an unrealizable dream; nor in the intelligence and understanding of those who have been called upon to handle this tremendous task; but rather in the methods by which they have set out to reach their goal.

If one studies carefully the Briand plan and its evolution during these two years, and views the results in the proper background of an unbiased and judicious interpretation of postwar European history, one is led inevitably to the conclusion that the plan was foredoomed to failure because of the preconceived precepts which were accepted as its guiding principles. In other words, the path on which salvation is now sought does not lead in a new direction, but is merely a new road going in the same direction in which Europe has been marching since 1919. Because of these preconceived ideas, the United States of Europe would be built on a basis wherein certain factors of essential importance, having a very real

bearing on the development of a community interest among European nations, have been disregarded, whether purposely or unintentionally is here immaterial.

It will be remembered that the French memorandum of May 1, 1930, suggested three fundamental principles on which the building of the proposed union should proceed: (1) In general, the economic problem should be subordinated to the political problem. (2) The independence and sovereignty of the participating nations should not be impaired. (3) The economic organization of Europe should be directed toward "a *rapprochement* of the European economic systems effected under the political control of the Governments acting in concert." [1] While these principles were not accepted unequivocally by the participating governments, and the course of events has not always permitted a rigorous adherence thereto, their enunciation alone was sufficient to delay the liquidation of the European crises. For these principles, if closely scrutinized, will prove the truth of the suggestion made above that they represent preconceived ideas which have weakened from the very outset the plan of M. Briand.

The subordination of the economic to the political problem was suggested on the assumption that,

> All possibility of progress on the road to economic union being strictly governed by the question of security, . . . it is essential to bring on to the political plane at the outset the constructive effort tending to give Europe its organic structure . . . the economic sacrifices to be made to the commonwealth should find their justification only in the development of a political situation permitting confidence between peoples and the true pacification of minds. . . .

Several of the governments, in their replies to the French memorandum, took issue with this assumption. While it is obvious that political problems have an important, frequently an overwhelming influence on economic questions, nevertheless the relation between politics and economics is one of inter-

[1] *League of Nations Document* No. A. 46. 1930. VII. (VII. Political 1930. VII. 4.)

dependence rather than one of subordination. The predominance of the one over the other is determined by, and varies according to, circumstances. The subordination of economics to politics, stated as a general principle in the French memorandum, was doubtless dictated by the complex of "security" —a complex which has dominated French policy in all of its manifestations since 1919. The word "complex" is used intentionally, because the concept of "security", as the term is now used and understood in European chancelleries, is irrational and unreal. It has led France in the past thirteen years to the commission of more grave diplomatic blunders than have been indulged in by any nation in the course of history. No matter what the issue may be, it is stated in terms of "security". As the word is used in connection with the European union, in the discussions around the League of Nations and in post-war diplomatic correspondence, "security" means that France will not be attacked again.

This complex of "security" is also responsible for one of the fundamental ills of Europe, the system of alliances. To insure "security", France has concluded political alliances supplemented by military conventions with Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia—a network which spreads uncertainty and creates the fear of an armed conflict throughout the continent.

"Security", therefore, means the subordination not only of economics but also of disarmament—a vital issue, indeed a condition precedent to the solution of all economic ills—to political issues. It means, in fact, the subordination of any and every issue to the certainty that France is safe: safe from Germany, from Italy, and also, if you please, from Great Britain. "Security", therefore, must be guaranteed before progress can be made in any other field. Putting it bluntly: built on this conception, the whole scheme of a European union cannot be regarded but as a device intended to safeguard the "security" of France.

The "security" complex, then, is at least a part of the reason why factors of great importance have been disregarded. It has been conceived that the European union is to be built

on the basis of the *status quo;* and it has evidently been forgotten that the dissatisfaction of peoples with this *status quo* is perhaps one of the most potent causes of Europe's material and moral decline. It has been forgotten that the present structure of Europe was born of the peace treaties; in other words, it was born of hatred, vengeance, deception, ignorance, selfishness and, above all, of complete lack of vision and statesmanship. For the stipulations which were conceived in the atmosphere of Versailles, St. Germain, Trianon and Neuilly, one should not judge the framers of those treaties too severely. The framers of the European federation scheme should have realized, in the atmosphere of Geneva, separated from the hysteria of 1919 by more than a decade, that certain fundamental errors and substantial injustices still exist, and are not conducive to the development of a community of interest and of a sentiment of solidarity. Witness to this is the rapidly increasing burden of armament—a burden much heavier today than it was before the World War. Added to the burden of war costs and the costs of economic depression—the burdens of "peace"—arms expenditures aggravate the situation beyond any conception. One may declare one's belief in peace and one's intention to promote and uphold it by all means. But the Danzig Corridor, the Saar Valley, the reparation payments unbalancing the economic life of nations, and the persecution of national minorities cannot be obliterated by pious declarations and speeches. They must be *dealt with.* A change of front is a necessary prerequisite of the peace of mind and the feeling of solidarity on which alone a federation can be built.

The second principle propounded in the French memorandum seems also to hinder rather than to promote a federal union. No change of front has taken place here either: the conception of sacrosanct sovereignty and political independence which we have inherited from Bodin is sought to be preserved in its integrity. But the political theories of the Middle Ages do not fit our age. The life of the international community has changed a great deal since Bodin's time; and one should not expect a static theory to square with the dynamic forces of modern civilization. As a matter of fact, nations do

alienate parts of their sovereignty in every treaty they conclude with each other whereby they agree to do or not to do certain things. It is well to remember that nations have already accepted substantial limitations on the exercise of their sovereignty by signing the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Pact of Paris. Unless nations are willing to continue on this path and are ready in the interest of the international community to accept further limitations—limitations which must of course apply equally to every member of this community whether great or small, powerful or weak, rich or needy—then there is no use to talk about a federal union, no matter how loose the link may be.

The third principle enunciated in the French memorandum looks harmless enough at first sight. But, by implication, it also offers an impediment to real success. The *rapprochement* of the European *economic* systems under the *political* control of the governments is another emanation of the "security" complex. It means that the governments must retain a firm grip on every endeavor to remedy the situation. Nothing should be said, much less done, which would be likely to take out or replace one single brick from the structure of Europe, lest the whole building tumble. It was stated in the memorandum that,

> After the adoption of the general programme of European co-operation, the Committee might entrust the study of certain subjects to special technical committees, making sure that there exist conditions such as will enable the work of the experts always to be kept under the control and direct inspiration of the political element emanating directly from the Governments which remain jointly responsible for the prosecution of their international undertaking and which alone can ensure success on the political plane where it finds its supreme justification.

In other words, the experts intrusted with the investigation of problems such as tariffs, or industrial or financial issues, or transportation, should not be at liberty to state such conclusions as might be reached on the basis of scientific research. They should not report the results of the science or calling from whence they were chosen. There should be no frank, square

facing of *facts;* there should be no fearless sincerity in the dealing of nations with one another. These experts should be the mouthpieces of governments and their conclusions and recommendations would have to be adjusted or, better, subordinated to political exigencies—to the complex of "security".

The pressing and urgent problems of life have corrected somewhat the course of conduct set forth in the French memorandum. For instance, the turn of affairs in Europe from bad to worse impelled M. Briand to suggest at the January session of the European Committee that the economic question should first be considered — quite contrary to his original point of view. But such corrections were not sufficient to obliterate the fact that the European union scheme started on a beaten path, instead of seeking its objective on a new road. Following M. Briand's suggestion, the committee listened with close attention to a report made by Mr. Colijn, the President of the Economic Conference held under the auspices of the League in November, 1930, setting forth the results of this conference. Incidentally, his *exposé* may be regarded as the ablest and most fearless analysis of the European situation made in the past decade; at the same time it is also one of the most discouraging pictures ever drawn of our much-praised civilization. His report made a deep impression on the members of the committee. Yet a considerable part of the seven meetings of the January session was devoted to the problem of whether or not European states not members of the League should be invited to participate in the proposed union; and, if so, when and how they should be invited. Not that this matter is unimportant. But only a student of constitutional law could find gratification in the speeches interpreting, analyzing and defining, with the finest shades of distinctions, exclusions and inclusions, the substance and the extent of the powers of the European Committee in the light of the Assembly resolution which called it into being.

It seems that in order to bring about a union or a federation of European states, a complete change of approach in dealing with international problems is necessary. It seems that unless the statesmen and the peoples of Europe (and indeed of all the

world) face facts frankly and fearlessly; unless they are ready to take cognizance of grave errors committed in the past; unless they are prepared to correct such errors even at some sacrifice; unless they recognize that our completely changed civilization requires a completely different method of dealing with the intricate relations between nations, and are willing, consequently, in good faith and to the best of their ability, to substitute the technique of scientific dealing with facts for the old technique of proceeding on the basis of theories, doctrines and precepts dictated by political or emotional reasons and having frequently no connection whatever with the realities of a steadily moving civilization—unless these fundamental and indispensable changes in mental attitude are brought about in one way or another, there can be little doubt that this European union will bring just as much disappointment as did the League of Nations.

The League was established with the very same ends in view which inspired M. Briand to propose a union of European states. The League has done unquestionably a great deal for the cause of peace. In certain fields, such as labor and health, its influence has in some cases substantially contributed to bring about saner, more reasonable conditions and, therefore, to making life more bearable for peoples in different parts of the world. Moreover, in the administrative sphere the foundation of international government has been laid by the establishment of the Secretariat of the League, a smoothly working, effective and reliable organization with competent persons at their posts—an organization of which any foreign office might well be proud. Again, by the periodic meetings of its permanent organs, by the calling of conferences on various problems, by the establishment of technical committees, the League has inspired the evolution of a new technique for the handling of international relations which is a most valuable gift to modern diplomacy. In view of the atmosphere in which the League started on its career, it is surprising that it has as much to its credit as it has.

However, as an effective instrument of peace, the League, it must be admitted frankly, has fallen far short of expecta-

tions. The fault, it should be stated emphatically, is not with the League. Failure can be attributed exclusively to those preconceived ideas which have made impossible, or at least exceedingly difficult, any progress in substantial, really important issues having a direct, immediate bearing on the pacification of Europe: issues wherein real or alleged interests of the powers are measured not in the terms of the future toward which nations are bound, but in the terms of the past from which we have asserted we wish to depart. With these mental patterns and under the influence of the war complex, the League started out as a mutual insurance company for the Allied and Associated Powers. In the course of years, this tendency has become less marked, in that the representatives have made an effort to be polite even to those who happened to be on the other side of the fence. With this slight turn, the League has become a school of politeness: a League of Mutual Admiration where frank words are seldom spoken and where everyone is exceedingly careful to circumvent the truth as diplomatically as possible, for fear that hearing it may offend the sensitiveness of some one. But the League, in spite of the progress which has been made, is still an instrument in the hands of those who dominate Europe with their might; it is still an agency for settling great disputes between small states and small disputes between great ones.

There is a close analogy between the League of Nations and the proposed European Union. The organization of the latter was closely modeled on that of the former. Unless we throw off the impediments which stood in the way of the League to prevent it from becoming what President Wilson conceived it to be, the European Federation, too, will become a sort of farce, a jest thrown into the face of nations carrying with increasing difficulty and reluctance the heavy burdens imposed upon them by the war and, still more, by the peace. The tide of discontent and despair is rising more rapidly than is believed. It is time for those responsible for the conduct of Europe's affairs to stop, to reflect, and to alter their course.

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