

WHAT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE HAS ACHIEVED IN FIVE YEARS

By MAURICE LATEY

WHEN Parliamentarians of 12 nations met together in Strasbourg five years ago—on August 10, 1949—to “make” Europe, they differed both about the Europe they wanted to make and how to set about it. Each nation had its own ideal of international co-operation. There were the French with their aspiration towards common citizenship under a common federal government. There were the Benelux countries seeking to transfer to a wider stage their own experiment in economic union. The representatives of those countries and Italy formed the core of those who sought to transform the European Consultative Assembly into a real Parliament making laws and levying taxes.

Then there were Britain’s representatives with the model of the Commonwealth always before their eyes, seeking a community of sovereign nations bound together by common loyalties, ideals, and interests co-operating on common tasks; and there were the Scandinavians who, having lived and worked together in amity for many generations without any common government or institutions, shared the same sort of view. This came to be known as the functional approach, according to which a united Europe could be made by practical co-operation on common tasks.

The history of the first years of the Council of Europe is above all the record of the debate between these two points of view. The federalists complained that since all the power rested with the Council of Ministers who were responsible to sovereign independent governments, the Consultative Assembly was a mere talking-shop. The functionalists were afraid of being dragged into commitments for which they had no mandate from their peoples and parliaments.

The Eden Plan

The debate came to a climax in 1951 when that great European, Mr. Spaak, resigned from the Presidency, later to become President of the smaller Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Pool in which he could exercise real power. It became necessary, if the Council of Europe was to survive, to reach a *modus vivendi* between the two views. The way was suggested

by Mr. Eden in 1952. With the admission of Germany, Greece and Turkey, 15 countries were now represented at Strasbourg.

The Eden plan recognized their division into two groups—the “Little Europe” of the six, France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries who were working towards federation; and the nine others who were more loosely associated. These other powers would, according to the Eden plan, co-operate as closely as they could, short of an actual renunciation of sovereignty, with the six who would proceed with their plans of federation, and the Council of Europe at Strasbourg would supply the framework for this co-operation. The proposed United Kingdom association with the European Defence Community, by which United Kingdom troops will form part of the European Army, is an example of this kind of co-operation.

Such a compromise was only possible because the Council of Europe had already gone some way towards remaking Europe. It was the first institution where Germany could resume her seat as an equal partner. It had worked out a common declaration of human rights to which all its members subscribe, with a Commission to which appeals can be made in cases of infringement. Interchanges of social, medical and educational benefits have been arranged. It had played its part in working out the creative idea of the European Coal and Steel Pool. Since then the Council has been able to claim credit for the “Van Maters” plan which has brought the vital Saar problem nearer to solution than ever before.

Potentialities

That is not a bad record on its fifth birthday. But, of course, a five-year-old must be judged not so much by its achievements as by its potentialities. These can be better assessed now than was possible at that first Assembly in Strasbourg in 1949.

At that time a good many people in Europe and many more across the Atlantic saw the United States of Europe developing on American lines. But hundreds of years of history, ancient traditions, loyalties and vested interests speak against this. The European economy cannot, even if customs barriers were broken down, become a great self-sufficient unified market on the United States model. Nor can a uniform government be imposed on a continent whose greatness lies in its infinite variety. Moreover any European Union is bound to be in-

complete while so many states in the East are, as satellites of the Soviet Union, denied the right of self-determination; and any organization must be kept flexible enough to provide for the eventual return of these states to the European community.

Further, Europe can never be an isolated entity. Her life and her lot are bound up with that of the world across the oceans. This is a leading reason why Britain has a vital part to play, a part which would be impossible if her links with the mainland became so close as to endanger her connection with the Commonwealth overseas. For the same reason the Council of Europe is dependent for its success on association with other institutions that spread beyond Europe, such as the North Atlantic Treaty organization.

First then the core must be made sound by overcoming the age-old enmity between France and Germany. Then an organization must be evolved which will preserve the virtues of nationalism while curbing the vices of international anarchy. Strasbourg is a centre in a great experiment—and experiment implies frustration and failure as well as success—designed to show that Europe which gave the world the virtues and vices of nationalism can also provide the antidote so vitally needed in the atomic age.
