

# Council of Europe

## *Lady Tweedsmuir, M.P.*

**T**HE Council of Europe is now four years old. The movement for European Unity was inspired by Mr. Churchill, and heralded by two famous speeches at Fulton and Zurich. He led an upsurge of public opinion to form a Congress of the Hague in 1948. We were a strangely assorted gathering there and an extraordinarily interesting one, for it was not only an assembly of politicians. There were philosophers, industrialists, economists, men and women of vision and experience, and many who just came because they believed deeply that Europe, both captive and free, must have leadership again. For Europe, after the second World War, was not only physically shattered but spiritually weakened, and her statesmen saw clearly that hope for a confident creative Europe lay in a movement to unite her peoples in a common purpose. Much was being done at that time to restore the Western European economy. There was, however, no Forum of European opinion which could give moral and intellectual leadership both to her free and to her captive peoples, and it was this that the Council of Europe was designed to do.

**S**O it was in the year 1949 that the House of Europe was formally opened at Strasbourg. This beautiful French city was chosen as the seat of the Council of Europe because, being but two miles from the German border, and having been constantly disputed territory, it was

thought to be a symbol of the end of age-long wars between these two great continental countries. Parliamentary representatives of the ten nations now meet at Strasbourg twice a year for a total period of one calendar month. Although Europe, since the last war, has been cut in half by the descent of the Iron Curtain imposed by Russia on her satellite countries, the fifteen nations who compose the Council of Europe do not accept the permanent division of Europe. However, at this time, European unity can only be considered in the context of those Western European nations who are free of communist domination. Yet even all of these do not play their part at Strasbourg for various political reasons of their own.

The member States of the Council of Europe are: France, Italy, Western Germany, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Saar, Eire, Iceland, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The delegates are chosen by their National Parliament according to the strength of their political parties, and in proportion to their population. There are 132 at the moment. For instance, while the United Kingdom has 18 delegates, Iceland has 3. This method is a great improvement on the United Nations Organization procedure where delegations from Cuba and the United States of America have the same number of members, and therefore the voting power of large and small nations is thrown out of balance. The Council of Europe is composed of two

bodies: the Consultative Assembly and the Committee of Foreign Ministers. The Assembly has no executive power, but resolutions passed by a two-thirds majority are examined by a committee of Foreign Ministers from each member State. At present only an unanimous vote by the Ministers can carry a Resolution forward for debate in National Parliaments. In fact, the power lies with the Committee of Foreign Ministers.

## II

**W**HAT then has the Council of Europe achieved? It is consultative, and on being consulted, has given advice. The Assembly called for the admission of Western Germany on equal terms to the Forum of the Western European Powers. It called for the creation of an European Army. It has suggested practical work to aid eleven million refugees from behind the Iron Curtain, now an immense burden on the over-strained economies at the centre of Europe. Because the Assembly had among its members jurists of international repute, it was able to produce a detailed Convention of Human Rights. The Assembly is working out ways and means whereby such bodies as the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and others can be brought within the purview of the Council of Europe, which can then provide that Parliamentary check so necessary to executive bodies. There are many committees that meet regularly throughout the years who study many important subjects, and who report back to the Assembly. This work is undertaken in private, without the Press, and is therefore little known.

The influence of the Council of Europe depends on the status of its members, many of whom hold important positions in their own country. For instance, in the early days, Mr. Winston Churchill lent great authority to the proceedings. The power of the Assembly lies in its capacity to influence National Governments through the Committee of Ministers, and by making its work known in the various countries, to stimulate a two-way movement of ideas and so to become a true Forum of European opinion.

So far so good. But the end of the year 1952, saw a crisis in the affairs of the Council of Europe. Its members had to face the fact that six of their number have formed a powerful Federation: France, Western Germany, Italy and Benelux have established Headquarters at Luxembourg to form a common pool of their resources of iron and steel.

They have, furthermore, formed a committee of experts to work out a Constitution for a political authority to control this Federation. The nine nations who watch the going of the six may well ponder on the enormous strength of this new giant which has a larger population than America and a greater industrial potential than Russia.

The United States, which has poured help so generously into Western Europe, appears at times impatient that the other nations should not join a political federation, and so pool their resources and speak with a united voice. The long history of Europe cannot be compared with the problems of the New World, and indeed it is often forgotten that a bloody Civil War preceded the creation of the United States of America. Yet even isolationist opinion would probably not wish to see federation of Europe at the price of discord of the nations concerned. Certainly Western Europeans will feel that, with Mr. Eisenhower as President, their problems will be understood and wisely interpreted to Congress by so distinguished an American who has worked beside them in war and peace.

## III

**A**S far as Britain's position is concerned, no political party in the United Kingdom will support a political federation with the Continent of Europe because the United Kingdom feels herself as part of a far wider group, as a partner in the Commonwealth and with world-wide Colonial responsibilities, as the close friend of America and also as a European nation. It is for these reasons that Britain sponsored the invitations to members of the Commonwealth to send observers to the Council of Europe, and to Congress to

send a delegation to attend a short Session in 1951.

On the other hand, Britain is deeply concerned that the federation of six Powers will split the movement for European unity. The six are but half of half Europe and if they drive on alone, in our judgment the end is clear, the domination by Germany of the economy of continental Europe. Britain has fought for four hundred years to prevent the Continent uniting against her. France is well aware of this. Yet Mr. Schuman and Dr. Adenauer, in their wisdom, were seeking for an end of the long struggles between their countries, which, of course, is warmly supported by Britain. France would welcome above all else that Britain should become a full member of the Steel and Coal Authority. At present the United Kingdom has established a permanent Delegation at the seat of the High Authority at Luxembourg, headed by Sir Cecil Weir, and supported by a team of technical experts. Their task will be to enter into negotiations with the six Power Federation, on prices, on markets and wages, on production, on matters vital to the industrial life of Britain. When the formation of this Coal and Steel Community was first mooted two years ago, debates in the British Parliament showed the Conservatives anxious that Britain should take part in the talks on the creation of this Pool, believing that we could help mould the structure that could include the United Kingdom. The idea was rejected and now it is too late, unless no final decision is reached on the Political Authority. Then, maybe we can start again.

In the meantime, as far as the Council of Europe is concerned, Mr. Eden as British Foreign Secretary, has put forward a proposal now termed "the Eden Plan." Briefly it suggests a two-tier system within the framework of the Council of Europe. At one tier the six Powers shall sit in restricted Session, using the common services of the Council of Europe, and the remaining nine Powers shall attend as observers, having the right to speak but not to vote. At the second tier, the Council of Europe sits in full Session of fifteen members as at present. The "Eden" proposals were una-

nimously adopted by the Council of Europe and are now being worked out in detail.

Yet I am uneasy. The power lies with the six. This cannot be the final answer. It seems doubtful if an Advisory Consultative Assembly meeting for one month a year can contain a full-blooded, full-time elected Parliament with legislative powers. It seems doubtful if the Council of Europe's small Secretariat can supply the framework of a Civil Service to a Federal State. It seems doubtful too whether even Strasbourg could remain the centre and provide the accommodation of this new giant Power and Government. One can, however, say that the British Foreign Secretary has kept alive the desire for a truly united Western Europe, and kept alive the desire also to prevent friction between the Coal and Steel Community and the Council of Europe. We have yet to work out Britain's own relationship with Federal Europe.

The other great concept that involves the six Federal Powers and which still hangs in the balance is the European Defence Community. Born of the idea of a European Army, this Community now awaits full ratification, notably by France and Germany. Here the relationship with the Council of Europe is different from that of the Coal and Steel Community. This is a military Defence Force and as such comes under the Command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the real Power for peace in the world today. To France the larger grouping of N.A.T.O. places the German problem in the right perspective and the "infra-structure", *i.e.*, the common services of the E.D.C. is a safeguard, amongst others, against the re-birth of the German Wehrmacht. There are many political difficulties ahead. Maybe ratification will not take place. Then the re-grouping of the Defence Forces in the West will have to be set in a different mould.

OVER all this broods the problem of the Saar. This rich territory, ever disputed by France and Germany in the struggle for the balance of power, is at present under French control. Germany

pointing to her kith and kin and the chequered history of this land at the heart of Europe, puts her claim to be master of its fate. Efforts are being made to reach agreement by creating the Saar the first "European" soil, and so making Saarbrücken the capital of all European communities, including the Council of Europe. The idea is very attractive for, unless the Saar dispute is settled, other alliances between France and Germany will be uneasy and their future in doubt. It is a symbol of the fears and suspicions of a continent torn and horribly tortured in two frightful wars within thirty years.

It is against this background that we must try to picture and understand the movement for European unity that has found expression in the Council of Europe. On the Continent the profound belief in a common destiny is held deeply by many

distinguished Europeans, and passionately by their youth. Whether a Federal Union of the few, born of fear, is wise, is anxiously debated throughout Western Europe. Britain's task is to ensure that European unity is truly founded, that the Council of Europe shall survive, that all fifteen nations shall work together; above all, that should the outside pressure of communism wane, that the nations do not fall apart. Communism is a world-wide conspiracy. So Britain feels that her influence must be that of a World Power if she is to play her part in the search for peace. Only thus can she be a force in European politics and fill the vacuum of accepted and acceptable leadership left by a ghastly war. Conscious always that "there is no such thing as political evaluation, only the consequences of good leadership, of bad leadership, and of no leadership at all."

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### *Live And . . . Earn*

Education is not given for the purpose of earning a living;  
it's learning what to do with a living after you've earned it.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.