

Past Perspectives

The European Youth Campaign in Ireland (1950s)

Introduction

The last issue of *Youth Studies Ireland* included an article providing an update on developments at European level relating to young people, youth work and youth policy. Here we look back some 60 years to a time when the idea of a European youth 'sector' or 'movement' was still in its infancy. The late 19th and early 20th centuries had seen national governments throughout Europe explicitly attempt to mobilise youth not just in political or military terms but cultural ones too, often as a key part of the very process of nation-building. It was after the Second World War that the politicisation of youth took on an international dimension. In November 1945 the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) was founded in London by youth movements from the states signatory to the United Nations Charter (signed in June that year in San Francisco). However with the onset on the Cold War almost all Western European organisations withdrew from WFDY and it became associated with Soviet-aligned countries. In 1948 the World Assembly of Youth was founded, which 'clearly established two sides in international youth affairs and tied them to the geopolitical reality of the time' (Porcaro, 2010: 29). The 'first big wave of Europeanisation of youth organisations' (ibid.) arrived with the founding of the European Youth Campaign in 1951. The Campaign was funded by the American Committee for a United Europe (ACUE) which had close links to the CIA and provided funding to pro-federalist groups and parties in Europe, although often without the beneficiaries knowing where the money was coming from (Saunders, 2000). In Ireland the European Youth Campaign was launched in 1953 and the Irish Independent reported on the event (18th April) under the headline 'Youth Campaign to Counteract Communism'. The booklet published by the European Youth Campaign in Ireland to raise public awareness of its objectives and activities is reproduced in full below.

Maurice Devlin

*

References

- Porcaro, G. 'Geopolitics of Youth Policy in Post-War Western Europe (1945-1967)', *Coyote*, November 2010, 28-29.
- Saunders, F.S. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. New York: The New Press, 2000.

The European Youth Campaign in Ireland

The Background of the European Youth Campaign

'While...Europe has been the mainspring of the civilisation and culture which now spans the world, she has also been the storm centre and the origin of the wars which have caused so much destruction to the social structure.' (Extract from the speech in which Mr Sean MacBride, then Minister for External Affairs, presented the Statute of the Council of Europe to Dáil Éireann for ratification.)

The destruction caused by war to the social, economic and political structure of Western Europe was never more apparent than in 1945. There was no longer a great difference between the victorious and conquered nations; there was only a suffering Europe. Whole countries had been lost to the West and to freedom. The hungry, the homeless, the discontented, were everywhere. Even the few places which had mercifully escaped the armed conflict were affected by the six years of war which had gone on around them. The leaders and the people of Europe wanted to rebuild their countries in security and harmony; they wanted to protect their common civilisation from the threat of Communism, and, above all, they wanted to ensure that their continent would not become, once more, a battlefield for a third World War. There were many belonging to different creeds, political parties and social groups who thought that the way to attain these ends was through the unification and integration of Europe. Many groups, organisations and societies were formed to work towards the same end. 'The European Union of Federalists', 'The Economic League for European Co-operation', 'The United Europe Movement', 'The Socialist Movement for a United States of Europe', 'The French Council for a United Europe' and 'The European Union of Christian Democrats (Nouvelles Équipes Internationales)' were some of the most important groups which developed during the following years. These are only the larger groups, but there was a multitude of small and active ones on the same pattern. Working apart and without a co-ordinating link, it almost seemed as though each of these societies was actively opposed to the next.

In May, 1948, all these organisations met at a Congress in the Hague and, as a practical example of what they meant by unity, gave a lead to the statesmen of Europe by forming the European Movement, which henceforth was to co-ordinate their activities.

From the Hague a call went forth to set up a European Parliamentary Assembly and an appeal for the preparation of a Charter of Human Rights with a European Court of Justice. In May, 1949, exactly one year later, a treaty was signed in London and the Council of Europe came into being.

The Council of Europe is composed of a Consultative Assembly consisting of the representatives appointed by the Parliaments of the member countries, and a Committee of Ministers representing the European governments. Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom were the first to sign (joined later by Greece, Iceland, the Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey; the Saar becoming an Associate member) and they signed the Statute: 'To effect a closer union among the members in order to safeguard and

promote the ideals and principles which constitute a common heritage and to encourage economic and social progress.'

The members of youth organisations were naturally even more concerned about the future than those of the adult movements. They were worried by the indifference, apathy and depression of the greater part of the youth. The more enthusiastic and discerning wanted to have a say in determining whether Europe would freely unite herself or, disunited, would fall a prey to a unified totalitarianism. Free youth movements, however, suffered from lack of co-ordination and dynamism and were handicapped by the propaganda of their Communist and non-democratic rivals. In March, 1952, their representatives met in Bièvres, near Paris, under the auspices of the European Movement and, in spite of the difficulties and obstacles, the European Youth Campaign was born. It was NOT formed to teach youth organisations how to run their own affairs, nor merely to hold mass meetings along Communist lines with speeches and flag-waving and spectacular posters. In addition to this superficial propaganda its work was to be one of fundamental education.

The following are, briefly, the aims and ideals of the European Youth Campaign:

To break down the barriers of hate and suspicion built between nations during two world wars.

To help national youth organisations to inform their members about the situation and problems existing in fellow-countries of Europe.

To inspire youth movements with the ideals which will preserve their religious, cultural and social heritage.

To make young people realise that the State is a human institution which must be prepared to share its power with others if it becomes necessary for the good of its citizens.

To ensure that young people will take their part and assume their responsibilities in the future of their Continent.

The Structure and Work of the European Youth Campaign

In most of the member countries of the Council of Europe (and in Switzerland, Austria and Finland) there is a National Committee composed of representatives from all the organisations which work with the European Youth Campaign. [See list at end.] This meets at intervals during the year to decide the policy and working of the Campaign on the national level. There is a National Secretary in each country who is responsible for organising the national work of the Campaign and who acts as a link between the National Committee and a Central Secretariat which co-ordinates the activities of the different countries.

The practical work done by the Campaign in Ireland may be summarised as follows:

1. To organise conferences, lectures and meetings on subjects of Irish-European interest and importance.

2. To provide speakers, films or literature of an international nature for affiliated youth organisations and to encourage them to increase the European content of their programmes.
3. To ensure the representation of Irish movements at youth conferences abroad.
4. To help, if requested, with technical help and advice, any affiliated youth organisation.

Irish youth must play their part in helping to shape the future of Europe. To do this they must receive some impetus and inspiration. To do it effectively, they must have the necessary information and background.

The contributions to discussions during the various conferences held by the Campaign during the past few years show the keen interest taken in present day problems and have been on a very high level. Irish delegates, whether young trade unionists, students, young farmers or members of voluntary youth organisations, have had an opportunity of bringing their contribution to youth conferences abroad. The amount of attention they have received and the interest shown in what they had to say are indications of how much their contribution is welcomed. The Campaign tries to ensure the continuation and improvement of that contribution. It tries to interest more and more of the members of youth organisations in Ireland so that its activities will not be confined to any one small group and so that it may be truly representative.

Ireland and the European Reality

Ireland may be romantically considered 'an island of dreams set in the grey Atlantic', she may be a young nation struggling to overcome the economic legacy of her tragic past, she may be a country of opportunity and promise, but she remains an integral part of Western civilisation and of the Continent of Europe from which it sprang. An overpreoccupation with the affairs of her immediate neighbour may sometimes obscure this fact, but, if Ireland is considered outside Europe, her past loses its significance and her future its natural development.

Ireland has supported almost all the major efforts towards European unity made during the past thirty years. When Mr Eamon De Valera spoke in the Dáil on the ratification of the Council of Europe he said: *'However, I can say for my part, and I think on behalf of our Party, that we support the ratification and that every step that is reasonably taken to bring about the unity of the States of Europe we will support ...'*

It is not the first time that representatives of this State have spoken in favour of Union. I was interested, as the representative of this State, in these ideas at Geneva, and I remember that it was like a cold douche to read some of the replies that were sent to the memorandum that was circulated in connection with the Briand proposal.' (The Briand proposal was the work of M. Aristide Briand, French Foreign Minister and a Nobel Prize winner, and was introduced in 1929 at the League of Nations. M. Briand proposed to set up a European Federation 'elastic enough to respect the independence and national sovereignty of each State while guaranteeing to all the benefits of collective solidarity'. The replies of the nations were unenthusiastic and after they had been sent to a Special Commission for study the proposal died a natural death.)

The congress at the Hague, from which the European Movement sprang, was attended by Dr Michael Tierney, President of University College, Dublin, Senator Eleanor Butler and the late Senator James Douglas as representatives of Ireland.

The Statute of the Council of Europe was signed by Mr Sean MacBride as the Irish Minister for External Affairs and the subsequent meetings of the Assembly and Council of Ministers in Strasbourg have been attended by Irish delegations.

These activities are not surprising when one remembers that one of the complaints of the Irish people for several hundred years was that they were cut off from the affairs of Europe and that the other countries of Europe have sent help and encouragement to their fellow nation when it was needed most.

Treaties and official expressions of friendship are, however, useless unless they are inspired and implemented by the convictions and enthusiasms of the citizens of the nations which make them. They are so much waste paper unless they represent the feelings of the people. It is in this connection that the Irish, and particularly the Irish youth, must realise their responsibilities. We have known war and famine and misery in the past. We have been spared the horrors and destruction of the last World War. It is surely our welcome duty to bring help and encouragement to those who have suffered even more than we have ever done.

Ireland can offer friendship to all the countries of Europe and she can implement that friendship with a real and lasting co-operation. The problems of the young unemployed in Italy or the young refugees in Germany should not cease to concern those who call themselves Christians merely because they live in a different country or speak a different language. Social, economic and political co-operation are needed if the questions which affect Europe, and Ireland as a part of Europe, are to be answered in a satisfactory way.

The Tánaiste, Mr William Norton, T.D., expressed the sentiments of the Irish delegation at the opening of the 1949 session of the Council of Europe when he said:

'... conferences and resolutions and even written agreements mean nothing unless each of us resolves that this Assembly shall forsake the methods of the past and plan for the future on the basis of truth and honesty – in other words, that we follow in our daily lives and in the relations of one country with another the simple philosophy of doing to others as we would wish them to do unto us. It is only on that basis that Europe can rise from its ashes and its impoverished people can rise from their knees to plan together and create the dawn of a new Europe...It is not from outward pressure, it is not from the sword that deliverance comes to nations; the sword cannot breed peace, it can only impose terms of peace. The forces, the influences, that are to renew the face of the earth, must spring from men's hearts.'

These words sounded as a warning in 1949 and were not heeded. They are as valid today and it is generally acknowledged that if they remain unheeded the consequences will be even more terrible than in 1939.

'The great nations of the Continent, with their long history freighted with memories of glory and power, may impede the construction of a European union, liable as they are, if they are not careful, to measure themselves by the standards of their own past rather than by those of the realities of the present and provisions for the future.'

United Europe cannot be built upon an abstract idea. She must depend for support on living men. Who will they be? Hardly the former statesmen of the old European powers It will come from men who sincerely love peace, from men of order and tranquillity These are the people who will carry on their shoulders the edifice of united Europe.'

(Extracts from the address of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, delivered to delegates of the Second International Congress of the European Union of Federalists in Rome, 11th November, 1948.)

The following organisations are represented on the Irish National Committee of the European Youth Campaign:

Boy Scouts of Ireland; Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland; Catholic Women's Federation of Secondary School Unions; Catholic Young Men's Society; Comhairle le Leas Óige; Dublin Institute of Catholic Sociology; Dublin University Association for International Affairs; Girls' Friendly Society; Irish Association of Catholic University Students; Irish Countrywomen's Association; Irish Girl Guides; Irish Students' Association; Macra na Feirme; Muintir Na Tíre; Tuairim.

Chairman:

Mr P.T. Hughes.

Secretary:

Miss Miriam Hederman, 71, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.