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Organisation of a Second "Round Table" devoted to Human Rights

Report
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
Rapporteur: Mr William van REMOORTEL, Belgium, Socialist Group

A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity between its Members and that one of the methods by which that aim is to be pursued is the maintenance and further realisation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;

Considering that the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which is one of the most important achievements of the Council of Europe, constitutes a first step towards the collective enforcement of Human Rights

which are the common heritage of the community of European peoples;

Desirous that, with a view to a deeper understanding of this concept, the historical, philosophical and legal significance of the sanctity of human rights should be more fully realised;

Believing that the most fitting and effective means of disseminating the idea of the Council of Europe would be to bring home to the public, on a suitably impressive occasion, the principles of personal and political freedom and the rule of law

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers :

1. that it invite the most eminent European legal thinkers to attend a second " Round Table " at which they would define the principles of a philosophy of Human Rights;
2. that it hold the " Round Table " at Brussels in 1958, in connection with the Council of Europe's participation in the Universal Exhibition ;
3. that it make the necessary appropriations for this " Round Table " to have the dignity and prestige of a major European event;
4. that it give the " Round Table " and its results the widest possible publicity.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1. General considerations

1. The first " Round Table " was held in Rome in October 1953 and was the subject of a report by the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 1954). Perusal of this report shows that an attempt was made to expound and discuss every factor, past and present, making for European unity of outlook, sentiment and interest. Politicians, historians, philosophers and publicists all sought out, by analysing events and ideas, reasons for confidence in the prospects of integration.

2. As compared with that experiment, the motion of M. Galletto and others (see Doc. 555), which forms the basis of the present draft Recommendation, has a more limited objective in view: examination of the principles of a philosophy of Human Rights. - The preamble to the motion shows that the idea is to study the particularly European aspects of such a philosophy and to bring it home to the public on a suitably impressive occasion.

3. Since the United Nations has adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it might be supposed that there is world-wide agreement on the inalienable rights of the human individual. But this would be a seriously mistaken assumption. To disabuse oneself, one has only to read M. Jacques Mari-tain's introduction to the collected documents relating to the Declaration, which was published by UNESCO in 1949. The author reveals the radical differences of outlook of the thinkers consulted and notes that they adopted the Declaration as a " programme of action " by recourse to a sort of empirical compromise

4. On the other hand, is there any unity of outlook (or better prospect of such unity) among the thinkers of Europe? - Here an affirmative answer may be given. The reason is that most European peoples have a common ethnic origin, being descended from the same stock, and also that, over a considerable period of time there has been intermingling between neighbouring peoples, even if of different stock.

5. This factor has also been operative in the sphere of ethical and religious thought, so akin to the field of Human Rights.

6. Much has been said and written about traditional and recently recognised " Human Rights ". - However, the last word has not yet been said on the underlying philosophical aspects of the European concept of the inalienable rights of the human individual. For this reason we welcome as particularly opportune, the step taken by M. Galletto and his colleagues.

7. A well organised " Round Table ", attended by eminent European legal thinkers, would make no mean contribution to the strengthening of European cultural unity in the highest sense. Its conclusions would be an encouragement from above—that is from the intellectual plane—to those who, with praiseworthy persistence, are using empirical means to bring about an integration which at one time seemed jeopardised but was no more than delayed.

8. Unfortunately, certain Human Rights are not yet universally exercised throughout the territories of Member States of the Council of Europe. The essential thing, however, is to proclaim their inviolable character : the rest will follow as a matter of course. - The second " Round Table" will undoubtedly contribute to this process

2. Organisation of the Meeting

9. The first " Round Table " in Rome derived its importance from the personal distinction of those who took part in it : men such as (MM. de Rougemont, Schuman, de Gasperi, van Kleffens and Toynbee). But it may be doubted whether the publicists who attended made a very significant contribution either to the discussions or to publicising the results of the meeting.

10. From this experience it seems doubtful whether it is desirable to have a small number of participants (5) and a larger number of publicists (15). It would probably be better to have a larger number of participants (say 10 or 12) and dispense with the publicists altogether.

11. Each one (or the majority) of the participants might read a paper on some aspect of the question of the international recognition and protection of human rights. Each paper might be followed by a discussion, and the papers themselves, together with a summary of the discussion, be published as a book. Some discussion meetings might take place before an invited audience consisting of appropriate people such as members of parliament, university professors, the more serious type of journalist, etc.

12. It is believed that such a book would have a wide appeal (and sale) provided that the participants were of really high quality; and this procedure would avoid the rather complicated procedure which has been necessary in order to put into book form the results of the first " Round Table ".

13. The papers to be read might cover mainly the principles of a philosophy of human rights.

14. The success of such a meeting would depend very largely on the quality of the participants. It might be desirable to compile a list of suitable persons from whom a selection could subsequently be made, but the actual selection could well be left to the Cultural Experts or to the Secretary-General once the Committee of Ministers has agreed in principle to the meeting.

15. If the second " Round Table " is held in 1958, it might be held in Brussels during the Universal Exhibition, the more so as one of the main features of the Council of Europe pavilion at the Exhibition is going to be devoted to the history of the respect for human rights in the development of political institutions.