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on

PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

Parliament and democracy in the
European Community today

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1. When we last met, my colleague Mr GLINNE demonstrated the close interdependence between parliamentary institutions and democratic life at all levels. Unfortunately, there are only too many grave examples to demonstrate what happens when this close link is slackened or broken. The excellent working document drawn up by the Latin-American Parliament for this conference is therefore obliged to review the major stages in the deterioration of the situation in this respect especially in the southern part of your continent.

Fundamental principles of democratic life

May I here recall for the benefit of us all, without wishing to indulge in systematic or critical statements, that there can be no true democratic life, that is no daily life which is dignified and tolerable for all nations, unless the government in power in any particular country respects certain elementary political and legal principles. Inter alia, its power must reside in the legitimacy freely granted by the people; free elections governed by constitutional procedures must be held at regular intervals and be open to all constitutional political bodies; there must be a genuinely wide spectrum of political parties, and every non-violent political body must have the right to exist; protection must be given to the constitutional opposition and it must have the right to express itself freely; particular attention must be given to all kinds of minorities and to their protection; bodies must be established which can effectively counterbalance the government, such as an independent legal system, a liberal system of education and alternative sources of information. If these political rights, which are based on the fundamental rights of freedom of association, of opinion and expression, are not guaranteed or respected, any discussion of democracy is sterile, rhetorical and of benefit only to anti-democratic forces. Democracy must mean extreme vigilance, a frank denunciation of abuse, whatever its origin, and the establishment of international solidarity to protect its own existence and survival.

2. Although we are perfectly entitled to criticize parliamentary institutions and to propose short-term remedies to improve the representation of the people and the means available for achieving it, such criticism cannot attack the very principle which underlies our social, democratic and liberal life. It is one thing to be open to criticism, but another to renounce our deeply-held convictions. The 'classical' theories have in my opinion become 'historical', and we should encourage everything which contributes towards a modern theory of parliamentary democracy. The separation of powers is respected virtually nowhere: I conclude from this that we do not need to aim at greater democratization of legislative or parliamentary power but that we must democratize simultaneously the power of parliament, of the judiciary and above all of the executive. It is time we put an end to the artificial duality whereby the executive, governments and States may arrogate

to themselves special rights and even exceed legality while the other bodies remain subject to constitutional and legal constraints. History shows us that political democracy is indivisible. We cannot expect a governing body to reform itself. It is the duty of international parliamentarism to bring a new spirit of democracy to our executives and to international relations. There is no other solid basis for the construction of a new international economic order and a new system of relations between the nations.

Two topical aspects of democratic life within the European Community

3. Let me now illustrate these principles by two topical aspects of parliamentary and democratic life in the European Community :

- the progress of the legislative preparations in the various Member States for direct elections to the European Parliament envisaged for 1978,
and
- the preparations for these direct elections being made by certain large political groupings.

We shall leave on one side anything concerning parliamentary life at national level in the nine Member States, democratic developments as far as they affect the protection of the individual or the public and the efforts of some of the other large political groupings in connection with direct elections.

4. On 20 September 1976 in Brussels, the representatives of the Member States of the European Community signed a Convention concerning the election of Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage in 1978. This decision is based on Article 21 of the 1951 Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and on Article 138 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community.

20 and 25 years respectively after the foundations for the construction of Europe were laid, the governments of the enlarged Europe finally expressed their wish to develop the democratic basis of the Community. As from these direct elections, the Members of the European Parliament, who are at present delegated by their own national parliaments to sit as representatives in the European Assembly will be elected by the citizens of the nine Member States of the Community. These are not 'European' elections in the proper sense of the term, but direct elections in each Member State for one and the same Parliament. The day when a large number of the 181 million potential electors go to the ballot boxes will undoubtedly be a great day for Europe and a milestone in the history of international democracy.

This directly-elected Parliament will have 410 members allocated as follows:

Belgium	24
Denmark	16
Germany	81
France	81
Ireland	15
Italy	81
Luxembourg	6
Netherlands	25
United Kingdom	81

Members will be elected for a five-year term and membership will be incompatible with office in a government of a Member State or as an active official of the European Community.

5. The Act of 20 September 1976 is subject to ratification by the Parliaments of the Member States. Similarly, each Member State has to decide its own electoral procedure.

The Act has already been ratified in Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. It should be ratified soon, before the end of the year, in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Most of the States will adopt their electoral legislation in the autumn. We should note here that six of the Member States have adopted the system of national proportional representation. The exact date of the elections is still to be decided by the Council.

These elections have already given rise to considerable interest not only in political circles and the European press but also among numerous international observers. The enterprise is indeed ambitious and will certainly have interesting consequences, although it is still too early to comment on these. Indeed, many problems must be solved before then: adequate information for all electors, the material organization of the elections, the preparation of electoral campaigns, and so on. The political parties are obviously the people most concerned by this new prospect; we shall look later on at some of the efforts being made to prepare for this D-day for European democracy.

6. The delegation from the European Parliament to this third Conference includes representatives of the six political groups at present organized within the European Parliament. Their representatives will certainly be only too glad to give detailed information on the progress of the preparations being made by the parties and groupings of parties to which they belong. To illustrate my theme, let me now give you just three examples of three

political movements which at present are the strongest at Community level.

In 1976, fourteen Liberal and Democratic parties from eight Member States, representing some 20 million European electors, became associated in the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community. This Federation aims at uniting those parties which wish to contribute towards the creation of the European Union within a framework of Liberal ideas. It aims at defining a joint position on the major problems affecting the Community and, in preparation for direct elections, to gain the support of the citizens of Europe for the construction of a unified Liberal Europe. In Spring 1977 the Liberal Federation examined a preliminary electoral programme which emphasized the importance of the freedom and responsibility of the individual in modern society, rejecting partisan dogma and opportunism. It came out in favour of an economic and social European Union Liberally inspired with a pacifist external policy for security in Europe and peace in the world.

In Spring 1976, thirteen Christian-Democratic parties from seven Member States joined together to set up the Federation of the Christian-Democratic Parties of the European Community; their European name is the 'European People's Party'. This party aims at ensuring close cooperation between its member parties and the groups belonging to the European Christian-Democratic Union and the Christian-Democratic Group in the European Parliament. Its objectives are the defence of a pluralist democracy on the basis of a common programme and support for the transformation of Europe into a European Union and finally into a Federal Union.

The Socialist, Social-Democratic and Labour Parties of eight Member States of the Community are associated in the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community. This Confederation has drawn up a European Socialist manifesto emphasizing in particular the need for an economic policy, the implementation of which would give the Community full employment, price stability, a more equitable distribution of incomes and wealth, the democratization of economic structures, economic democracy in the form of worker participation and the control of economic powers, improved social security, improved living and working conditions and greater educational opportunities. The Socialist Confederation wants Europe to develop into a stabilizing factor in international relations as well as a force for détente and solidarity, especially with regard to the Third World.

These three brief examples show that the political parties have worked out a European approach and that a new dimension in political activity has been acknowledged and already organized. This development will find a further practical application when the federations of the various political parties get round to drawing up their lists of candidates for

direct elections. We must hope that their proposals will correspond to the real needs of the various sectors of the population for representation, especially the least-favoured groups and certain minorities, particularly ethnic and linguistic minorities.

What I have said illustrates the fact that the direct elections to the European Parliament will call for considerable efforts. But they will bring the promise of a Europe of the people. In the last analysis, this Europe is the only one which is worth striving for and the only one which will endure.
