

Jean Monnet

His Life and Work

For a man such as Jean Monnet (1888-1979), who understood from his earliest political experiences that, "reflection cannot be separated from action", the salient facts of his life also represent an important guide to his philosophy and his way of conducting politics.

After spending his youth helping his father in the Cognac business, Monnet set himself at the outbreak of the First World War, in an effort to make himself useful, the "formidable problem" of organising supplies, which the Allies were unable to resolve and which could have compromised the outcome of the conflict. Having worked out the solution, namely joint planning by France and England, he managed to obtain an audience with the President of the Council, Viviani, and convince him of the validity of his proposal. Monnet was sent to London, where he set up an Anglo-French pool that co-ordinated the acquisition and transport of supplies.

At the end of hostilities, due to his brilliant achievements, Monnet was nominated deputy to the secretary-general of the League of Nations. Monnet began his new mission with great enthusiasm. He felt, as did many of his contemporaries, that this new international organisation would be able to impose itself, "by its moral force, by appealing to public opinion and thanks to customs which would ultimately prevail". Buthe was soon forced to recognise that the League of Nations was simply unable to achieve the goals of peace and harmony which it had set itself. Decisions could only be taken unanimously. Commenting on his experience, Monnet remarked that, "the veto is the profound cause and at the same time the symbol of the impossibility of overcoming national egoism". Neither a common will nor a common good could be achieved on this basis. In 1923, therefore, he resigned his post and returned to occupy himself with the family business.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Monnet was once again sent to London to organise the common administration of the

Allies' resources. Here, in June 1940, while the French army was being overwhelmed by Nazi troops, Monnet conceived a most audacious initiative which could have changed the entire course of the Second World War. He proposed a project for immediate federal union between France and Great Britain to

THE GREATNESS OF JEAN MONNET

Monnet was never the leader of a government, a party, an administration, or an organised force; and when he found himself at the head of an organisation (the French Planning Commissariat, and the European Coal and Steel Community), they were organisations that he himself had created, and which he managed for as long as they remained in a "nascent state". Precisely for this reason his case is worthy of meditation. It is usually held that one man alone is reduced to impotence in our organised and complex world, even as regards knowledge (this is why the foundations of morality, which rest on nothing but individuals, are shaky)...

Without Monnet's action there would be no Community. Over the years, months and days before its arrival, there was not a hint or a trace of such a project to address the issue in question (what role West Germany was to be given in the Atlantic system) among the parties, their deliberative and executive bodies, the government ministries or the governments themselves. The project was Monnet's, and the action of securing its acceptance by the governments was Monnet's (to Schuman and Adenauer belongs the credit, which in political terms was immense, of having immediately accepted Monnet's proposals)...

These are the facts, and their significance is clear. Monnet created the Community, and the Community conditioned European and world politics. This means that for the last twenty-five years, the great historical forces have followed or opposed a course of affairs that was established in part by one man alone, Jean Monnet.

M. ALBERTINI, *IL FEDERALISTA*, 1977

Churchill and De Gaulle, who accepted it. The joint *communiqué* reads as follows: "The two governments declare that in future France and Great Britain will no longer be two nations but a single Anglo-French Union. The constitution of the Union will entail common organisations for defence, foreign policy and economic affairs... The two Parliaments will be officially united". However this desperate attempt to prevent the defeat of France failed, because the French political class was already resigned to surrender.

Monnet thus decided to go to the United States in order to work on the Victory Program, convinced that America could fulfil a role as "the great arsenal of democracy". The economist Keynes was to say at the end of the conflict that through his co-ordinating work Monnet had probably shortened the Second World War by one year. In 1943, in Algiers, he joined the National Liberation Committee, "Free France", in which he collaborated with De Gaulle to organise the resistance in exile. During a meeting on 5th August 1943, Monnet declared to the Committee: "There will be no peace in Europe, if the states are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty... The countries of Europe are too small to guarantee their peoples the necessary prosperity and social development. The European states must constitute themselves into a federation..."

Immediately after liberation Monnet proposed a "global plan for modernisation and economic development" to the French government. Appointed Planning Commissioner, he carried out essential work for the reconstruction of the French economy. It was from this position that, in 1949, Monnet realised that the friction between Germany and France for control of the Ruhr, the important coal and steel region, was rising to dangerous levels, presaging a possible return to hostilities as had happened after the First World War. The solution to this state of affairs could not however be the federation, because France, proud of its so-recently recovered sovereignty, rejected it. For this reason

Monnet, together with a few collaborators, drafted a revolutionary proposal: to pool, under the control of a European government, Franco-German coal and steel resources. The Monnet Memorandum to foreign minister Schuman states: "By pooling basic production and the establishment of a new High Authority, whose decisions will be binding on France, Germany and the countries that join them, this proposal will lay the first concrete foundations of a European federation, which is indispensable to the and maintenance of peace". Schuman accepted the proposal and, in agreement with Adenauer, rendered it public on 9th May 1950. One year later, with the Treaty of Paris, six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg) founded the European Coal Steel Community (ECSC). So began the Franco-German pacification which today still represents the profound sentiment underpinning the process of European unification.

In 1955, after the serious crisis provoked by France's refusal to ratify the European Defence Community (EDC), Monnet founded the Action Committee for the United States of Europe through which, until his death, he tirelessly called on the European political class not to abandon the path of European unity.

Gradualism and constitutionalism

The strategy indicated by Monnet for con-

structing European unity can be termed the gradualist, or functionalist, method. The ECSC proposal represents the model, which subsequently inspired a large number of variants. Monnet felt there was only one way out of the *impasse* between France and Germany: "with a concrete and resolute action on a limited but decisive point, which provokes a fundamental change on this point and progressively modifies the actual terms of the problem as a whole" (Memorandum of 3rd May 1950). The creation of the ECSC did indeed bring about the results envisaged by Monnet. With Franco-German pacification, all aspects of the European problem were modified. There was a shift away from confrontation and the threat of a resurgence of power politics, toward the politics of cooperation, and over time it even became possible, through timely initiatives, to develop the seeds of democratic power contained in the ECSC project.

Initially Altiero Spinelli and the federalists criticised Monnet's functionalist approach, because it allowed confederal features of European politics, by which the governments retained a power of veto, to exist alongside supranational aspects. The pooling of certain sectors in reality masked the fact that governments were unwilling to cede sovereignty, which remained intact at the national level for the fundamental sectors of the currency and

defence. In contrast to the functionalist method, Spinelli proposed the constituent method as the only democratic way to build a Europe of the people with the involvement of the people themselves.

However, the long hard struggles to render the European Community democratic have convinced the federalists of the complementary nature of the gradualist and constituent methods. As long as the framework of international politics remains favourable to the European unification process, every institutional reform which favours unity reinforces the position of the pro-European forces and enables more advanced forms of struggle. This is the case with monetary union, which is provided for in the Maastricht Treaty, and which, if realised without a democratic European government, will expose crucial contradictions. Only through a democratic constitution which clearly defines the powers, responsibilities and rights of citizens, will European institutions cease to be considered by public opinion as the bureaucratic Europe of governments, and finally become the democratic Europe of citizens.

In short, while Monnet's gradualist method made it possible to start the process of European unification, Spinelli's constituent method is indispensable in order to bring it to completion.

POLITICS ACCORDING TO JEAN MONNET: MAN OF ACTION AND MAN OF POWER

What I undertook in every important phase of my life proceeded from one choice and one alone, and this limitation to a single goal has preserved me from the temptations of variety and also from the taste for power with its many facets.

This is how I am made, and I could not be otherwise. But I also believe that some things demand to be treated this way to obtain a result. This rule does not apply to those who must occupy themselves with all the affairs of state, since they have to consider all problems as a whole. This other attitude of mind, which is necessary to the politician, contains in itself the limits of his power over things. If he were dominated by a single idea, he would no longer be available for others, which however are also included in his duty; inversely, by dedicating himself to all, he risks losing that chance to act which is unique. Finding myself faced with this dilemma, I realised that I had better things to do than to try to exert power myself.

I realised moreover that in order to accede to this position I would have had to force myself. For the politician, the objective of every instant is to be in government, and there to be the first.

I have known no great politician who was not strongly egocentric, and for good reason: if he were not so, he would never have imposed his image and his persona. I could not have been this way, not that I was modest, but one cannot concentrate on one thing and on oneself. And this thing has always been the same for me: to make all men work together, to show them that beyond their divergences or over and above frontiers, they have a common interest. If competition was lively around power, it was practically zero in the domain in which I wanted to act, that of preparing for the future, which by definition is not illuminated by the lights of current affairs. Since I did not bother the politicians, I could count on their support. Moreover, whereas it takes a long time to reach power, it takes very little to explain to those who have arrived there how to get out of present difficulties: it is a language which they are glad to listen to at the critical moment. At that moment, when they are short of ideas, they are glad to accept yours, so long as they can claim the credit. Since the risks are theirs, they need the laurels. In my work, one has to forget about laurels. Whatever others may say about it, I have no liking for the shade, but if it is only at the price of self-effacement that I can conclude matters, well, in that case I choose the shade.

J. MONNET, *MÉMOIRES*, 1976.