

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Napoleon III's proposals for a European Union in 1863

September 28, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Before Coudenhove-Kalergi (how did that get memed so successfully, anyway?), there was another plan by the “liberator of Italy” himself, the plebiscitary caudillo Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, to the loud cheers of applause from the *Daily Telegraph*. It was to be a Congress of Nations going beyond the Metternichian concert. Lord Russell would not let it pass though, and much consternation followed in what has since become a footnote usually mentioned in the context of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis.

On Dec 4, 1863, the New York Times reports of “Napoleon's Proposition for a European Congress of Sovereigns (<https://www.nytimes.com/1863/12/04/archives/napoleons-proposition-for-a-european-congress-of-sovereigns.html>).” The NYT remarks that Bonaparte desires a Congress of Paris, but with a great peculiarity – to settle disputes before and not after war. This congress would then judge “not on the basis of facts as they stand, but of facts as they ought to stand, and would stand if reason and justice had supreme sway.” All in all, a singularly magnanimous cause, one that fires the sensibilities of poets and philanthropists. The NYT concludes that, suspicions by other sovereigns aside, “to whatever impulse it is due, the fact that all those who are summoned to the meeting, approach sword in hand, and port-fires lighted, proves to us that the mutual confidence and respect which can alone make all nations as one is still to grow up.”

This was but a brief addendum to an earlier Nov 22, 1863 report on “Napoleon and Poland (<https://www.nytimes.com/1863/11/22/archives/napoleon-and-poland.html>).” Here we learn that the motivating factor was the Russo-Polish crisis borne of the January Uprising, still ongoing at the time. We also have a much less optimistic tone: “He seeks to place Europe in the position from which he hopes to extricate his own precious person and empire. He aims to transfer from the shoulders of France to those of the assembled States of Christendom, the responsibility and the perils of the threatening conflict. But, despite the rumors to the contrary, he will fail in the effort. The conditions on which the Russian Minister offered to submit the Polish question to the decision of a general Congress will never be fulfilled.”

However, we have a much more striking expose from the pseudonymous author of *Anomia; or Liberalism and its Napoleonic messiah* (1866), where the fawning of the English liberal press is sampled in wide array:

The purpose to be served by the Congress of 1863 is as plain as that of 1815—we will not say as legitimate. Then, as now, the assembling of the representatives was occasioned by a Napoleon. It was that Napoleon who brought on the war, as it is this who threatens to bring on such a formidable peace; but the grand difference is that the former Congress was held to settle things on the total defeat of the first Emperor of Rome, as well as of France, while the second is convoked by the Emperor Of Rome And France, who intends to assist at it, if not to Preside.—Daily Telegraph, on Emperor's speech, November 10, 1863.

To substitute the reign of law for that of force, to **“regulate the present and secure the future,” to satisfy the just desires of oppressed nationalities**, and place the peace of Europe on a safe and lasting foundation—this is the object of the mission to which the Emperor Napoleon conceives himself to have been destined.

The doctrine which the first Napoleon practised, and the second has preached, amounts virtually to this, that human affairs can be best arranged By One Will And One Intellect.—Daily Telegraph, November 13. 1863.

M. de Girardin, be it known, proposes a Congress of Nations, with a view to proclaim Paris the capital of the world, and the Emperor of the French Emperor Of Peoples.—Le Temps, on new pamphlet, published in Standard, December 3, 1863.

It should be our pride as Englishmen, and whatever our differences of political opinion may be, to acknowledge the sagacity and magnanimity displayed in the treatment of a subject in which we, with our bygone political difficulties, should fully sympathise—displayed by a monarch who has disappointed his detractors and confuted his revilers, by acting, under good and evil report, not only towards England, not only towards Europe. but towards the world, as a wise ruler and an honest man.—Daily Telegraph, November 6, 1865, on Louis Napoleon's Manifesto on Algeria.

There is that about the proposition contained in the famous letter which would make its writer a leader of men, if he were not a ruler. Does not the master of France, weary of war and doubtful of resources, dream of a future Europe with a Napoleon for its federal lord?—Daily Telegraph, November 18, 1863.

It is probable that this able and energetic but restless ruler has rather in view his own exaltation than any real change for the better in the public law of Europe. Those who consider the Emperor's character and position will be convinced that it is his object to gain And Maintain A Preponderating Authority In European Councils. His own ambition prompts him to this; his relations to a democratic people prompt him to it also.—Times, November 12, 1863.

The Committee of the London Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace ask permission most respectfully to express to your Majesty the extreme satisfaction with which they have observed the proposal recently laid by your Majesty before the various sovereigns and states of Europe for assembling an International Congress, &c, &c.

To your Majesty belongs the signal honour of having taken the initiative in proposing to the States of Europe to substitute the arbitration of reason and justice for that of the sword.—Memorial of Peace Society to Emperor, Daily Telegraph, March 11, 1864.

To which the Emperor sent a gracious, though brief, reply :—

Justice must confess the grandeur and inherent truth of the Emperor's latest idea. – The idea is an imperial idea; it wears the purple of intellectual royalty, as well as that of such lower kingship as votes can confer or coronations affirm. Let us look at it from the stand-point of philosophy rather than diplomacy, and do homage to a thought which history will certainly not rank among the least elevated of the human mind. —Daily Telegraph, November 18, 1863.

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December 2, 2018 at 10:19 pm

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