

Book review by Peter Bateau

**“Hitler’s Cosmopolitan Bastard: Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and his Vision of Europe”
by Martyn Bond**

In his zoom talk at a recent event organised by North-East Surrey for Europe (NES4EU) Martyn Bond introduced us to the fascinating world of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi and his concept of Pan-Europa. The publishers’ sensational title to Martyn’s new book with a quote from volume III of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* is unnecessary to draw the attention of readers interested in the evolving idea of Europe.

Martyn describes the ancestry and life of Coudenhove-Kalergi (following the lead in his book I shall refer to him as RCK), whose consuming passion for Europe was woven around his entire adult life. For some there will be an excess of detail, but we can gloss over that (whilst admiring the very thorough research) and savour the story of RCK’s fascination with and proselytising for his concept of a united Europe and follow the twists and turns of its development from the time RCK left school in Vienna at the end of the first world war right up to his death in 1972.

RCK was born in 1894 in Tokyo, the second son of a blue-blooded Austrian diplomat and his Japanese wife. So not at all a “bastard”, but indeed a cosmopolitan in upbringing, outlook, travel, networks and linguistic ability. RCK’s patrician ancestry and mixture of Austrian and Japanese blood imparted a nature and nurture that gave him not only distinctive bearing and looks but great confidence and the ability to see the world as a chessboard. In his 20’s, against the backdrop of the polka-dot map of Europe and its colonies bequeathed by the Treaty of Versailles, he developed the concept of Pan-Europa, a vision of a unified Europe stretching from the Urals to the Atlantic, where nation would cease to go to war with nation, a continent which would coexist alongside the other great power blocs in the world.

For RCK, the world was divided into continental regions. During his life there were changes in the contours of Europe - the rise and fall of Nazi Germany along with Hitler’s dream of a German-dominated Europe, the fading away of the British Empire and the decline in the relative power of the United Kingdom, and after the second world war the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. RCK’s original vision of power blocs placed Britain and its empire as a separate region, incapable of fitting into his concept of a united Europe. He later changed his mind with the disappearance of the empire, and he always maintained close links with leaders in Britain, especially Winston Churchill. RCK always feared the rise of Hitler and after the defeat of Nazism maintained close relations with Adenauer. He did not live long enough to witness the fall of the Berlin wall, the reunification of Germany and the emancipation of continental Europe. But with his top-down view of the world he would have taken those developments as inevitable. In his view once Britain had lost its empire and opted against becoming a satellite of the USA it could and would become an integral part of a united Europe alongside the Americas, Russia and the Far East. Today, he would place more emphasis on the rise of China, although to give him credit he foresaw its growing importance. Africa did feature in his original design, included as part of the British and European empires.

RCK’s model was the democratic federation where states would co-operate and elements of sovereignty would be shared for the benefit of all. Successful federations could be as small as Switzerland or as mighty as the United States of America. Other examples were Canada, South Africa and Australia. Excessive nationalism was what tore nations apart. With a conviction from which he never deviated, RCK wrote his first book “Pan-Europa” in 1923, “designed” as he put it “to awaken a great political movement that at present is slumbering in all the peoples of Europe”. He founded the Pan-Europa Union movement in 1924, created its journal and from then on throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s held high

profile congresses and ceaselessly preached, networked and wrote letters, books and articles promoting the cause of European unity.

The extraordinary thing is that RCK did all this as a private citizen with no governmental or elected role. His networking in Europe and the USA, which continued into the years of the second world war and thereafter until his death, was of the highest order from Churchill to de Gaulle to Truman and almost every other politician whose influence he thought was valuable to the cause of a united Europe. He maintained a close, if somewhat strained, relationship with Jean Monnet, whose practical step by step approach to the task of building Europe was not one he felt sympathy for - RCK worked on the principle that politicians should buy into the whole concept and proceed from there. Although there was some carping, for instance by British Foreign Office officials, he and his movement were taken seriously, even if not always viewed as comfortable or convenient. RCK had the gift of asking the right questions. Although it is hard to point to concrete achievements, through consistent messages and constant activity RCK captured the hearts and minds of many political leaders and a great many other very important people and undoubtedly helped influence the cause of a more united Europe. At a speech at Chatham House in London RCK was introduced by Leo Amory as the prophet of an idea, that of European patriotism.

In his book, alongside the activities of RCK Martyn Bond charts the development of the idea of European unity as it started to take flesh after the second world war - the Marshall Plan and the OEEC, the Treaty of London and the Council of Europe, the European Movement, the Schuman Plan and the European Coal & Steel Community, the Messina Conference, the Treaty of Rome and the founding the EEC, the creation of EFTA, British applications to join the EEC and de Gaulle's vetoes and in the year of RCK's death Britain's decision to join the EEC. Each of these developments and many more are described and linked to RCK's ideas and advocacy.

Where is Europe today in terms of RCK's vision? The EU has the customs union, single market and common currency he foresaw, if not yet the defence arrangements. It is continuing to acquire new members. RCK would have been pleased that progress was being made but disappointed at what he would see as the continuing imbalance between the nation states and the democratic federal elements of the EU. It must be doubtful that his vision of a United States of Europe will ever be realized. In the current jargon, a different "landing zone" may be where the unique hybrid EU is headed - the current Conference on the Future of Europe may give us some clues. But wherever the EU goes, RCK's vision will have been a valued component in the thinking and engineering.

The withdrawal of the UK from membership of the EU would have disappointed but maybe not have surprised RCK. He would probably conclude that the lack of effort put into educating the British public about Europe and the EU, the erratic and conflicting interests of British politicians about accepting and playing a leading role in Europe and the longer than expected nostalgic overhang of empire, victory in war and exceptionalism had all contributed to Britain not yet being ready to accept what he saw as its rightful place in the world and in Europe. His conclusion might have been that Britain needed more time to learn the consequences of insularity and of betting on "Global Britain" and alliance with the USA.

PJB

10.7.21