

150
YEARS



On the occasion of its 150th anniversary, Solvay invites you to discover its history through twelve thematic pieces.

This month, discover how 5 remarkable personalities were part of Solvay before making it to the world stage

Chronicle # 7 - Solvay "people"

Since 1863, hundreds of thousands of men and women have worked to build the Solvay group. Some of them knowingly or unknowingly crossed paths with prominent personalities of their age. Here are some portraits of exceptional characters whose careers brought them into the Solvay galaxy before moving on to higher things.

Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934), President of the French Republic



In the first decade of the 1900s, Solvay, already well-established in eastern France, was having a hard time asserting its rights. Faced with tough and unbridled competition from local soda and salt producers, it brought in a young business lawyer, Raymond Poincaré, to defend its interests. The ideological outlook of this free-thinking and progressive lawyer were very much in tune with those of his Belgian client. Before reaching the highest office of state in 1913, Poincaré defended Solvay in several court cases involving non-compliance with commercial and industrial agreements, in particular in 1905 and 1910, when he had already held several ministerial posts. With his help, the Group was able to establish itself as the undisputed leader of soda production in France.

Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), mathematician

A physicist, philosopher and engineer, this cousin of the French President was among the scientific élite gathered at the first Solvay Physics Council. A famous photograph from 1911 shows him in discussion with Marie Curie, to the right.

CONSEIL DE PHYSIQUE SOLVAY
BRUXELLES 1911



Photo Coupré, Bruxelles

GOLDSCHMIDT PLANCK RUBENS LINDEMANN HASENHOHL
NERNST BRILLOUIN SOMMERFELD DE BROGLIE HOSTELET
SOLVAY LORENTZ KNUDSEN HERZEN JEANS RUTHERFORD
WARBURG WIEN MadamE CURIE POINCARÉ EINSTEIN LANGEVIN
FERRIN KAMERLINGH ONNES

John Foster Dulles (1888-1959), U.S. Secretary of State



As far back as 1881, Solvay opened a subsidiary in the United States in order to conquer the North American market. In 1920, the entity became part of the Allied Chemical & Dye Corp., the largest chemical conglomerate on the continent. Solvay was the main foreign shareholder with a 21% stake. But for Allied's CEO Orlando Weber, it was unthinkable that a non-U.S. company could influence the conglomerate's strategy, and gradually the Group lost all say in the business. John Foster Dulles, then a corporate lawyer, took over the defense of Solvay's interests. Working closely with René Boël, he undertook a delicate mission of industrial diplomacy, gathering a broad group of U.S. shareholders, which put Weber into a minority and forced him to accept the appointment of a Solvay representative to the Board in the person of George Murnane, the associate of a certain Jean Monnet. A few years later, Dulles was appointed Secretary of State (Foreign Minister) during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower.

Jean Monnet (1888-1979), "Father of a United Europe"



Widely recognized as a top flight diplomat and politician and as a founding member of the European Union, Jean Monnet was nearly sixty before devoting all his energies to public life. The first part of his professional life was devoted mostly to business. From the 1920s, he pursued a career as an international financial consultant. In 1936, he teamed with George Murnane and founded with him two companies, one in New York, one in Hong Kong. Between 1935 and 1945, the two men helped untangle thorny issues for the Solvay group. These included the release of funds sequestered in Italy by the Fascist government, and in particular the

'Allied Chemical' situation, with the aid of John Foster Dulles. Jean Monnet's privileged interlocutor at Solvay was René Boël. As the future President of the European League for Economic Cooperation from 1951 to 1981, the latter played an important role in the harmonization of Western European markets and legal systems.

Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005), Supreme Pontiff



What a surprise for Jacques Solvay and his wife Marie-Claude when in 1981 they received a letter from the Pope John Paul II thanking Solvay for saving his life!

In the late '30s, Karol Wojtyła was a student at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and pursuing his passion for theater. With the Polish defeat of 1939 and the country's dismemberment by Nazi Germany and the USSR, the university was closed by the occupant. To avoid deportation and forced labor in Germany, the young Wojtyła got himself hired at the Zakrzówek quarry and later at the Solvay plant at Podgórze. There he worked as a laborer from October 1941 to the summer of 1944. According to his biographers, he chose the night shift to have free time during the day to study at the clandestine seminary of Krakow, pray and

continue his theatrical activities. This highly dramatic period strongly marked the future pope. He later expressed his gratitude to the heads of Solvay's Polish subsidiary and to the Solvay family.

In 1982, John Paul II honored the Italian plant at Rosignano with a visit, during which he took great pleasure in lunching with Solvay workers at the company cafeteria.



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