

Comments on the Common Market by Tony Benn (January 1963)

Caption: In January 1963, Tony Benn, a member of the British Labour Party, speaks publicly about the risks that the United Kingdom would run should it be too hasty in joining the European common market.

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The Common Market

Not Going Into Europe

The idea of Britain joining the Common Market is emotionally very attractive. To throw open our windows to new influences, to help shape the destiny of a new community, even to merge our sovereignty in a wider unit – these offer an exciting prospect. By contrast the xenophobic, parochial delusions of grandeur fostered by the Beaverbrook press appear petty, old-fashioned, and reactionary. But the issue must not be decided by either of these emotions. A political decision of this magnitude calls for a cold hard examination by each of us of what is involved. It seems to me:

First, that the Treaty of Rome which entrenches *laissez-faire* as its philosophy and chooses Bureaucracy as its administrative method will stultify effective national economic planning without creating the necessary supra-national planning mechanisms for growth and social justice under democratic control.

Second, that the political inspiration of EEC amounts to a belief in the institutionalisation of NATO which will harden the division of Europe, and encourage the emergence of a new nuclear super-power, thus worsening East-West relations and making disarmament more difficult.

Third, that the trading policy which the community will inevitably pursue will damage the exports of under-developed countries and increase the speed at which the gulf between rich and poor countries is widening.

Fourth, that on balance Britain would have far less influence on world events if she were inside than she could have if she remained outside.

Fifth, that experience shows that written constitutions entrenching certain interests and principles are virtually impossible to alter.

Of course things will never be the same again. Remaining outside means making just as many radical changes in British economic, social and foreign policy as would be necessitated by going in. But we should be free to make them in the light of the wider needs of the world as we see them.

The Common Market as it now exists is inspired by narrow regionalism. Relevant internationalism today means accepting disarmament controls, following liberal tariff and trading policies, and working all-out through the UN to end the deadly contest between East and West and substitute a policy of co-operation based on our common interest in survival. Those are the causes that inspire the new generation.