

'The cow is too fat for us' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (13 January 1971)

Caption: On 13 January 1971, German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung paints a picture of the opponents of the common market in Great Britain and considers the main grievances of the 'anti-marketeers' in terms of the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. DÜRRMEIER, Hans ; Herausgeber HEIGERT, H. 13.01.1971, n° 11; 27. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Die Kuh ist zu fett für uns", auteur:Schröder, Dieter , p. 3.

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Great Britain: opposition to the EEC mounts

The cow is too fat for us

Propaganda is focusing just as much on a fear of rising food prices as on anxiety over loss of sovereignty

From our correspondent Dieter Schröder

London, January

British opponents of the EEC have nightmares about the Europe of the Six, where it appears in various terrifying guises. First, it took on the shape of General de Gaulle, who wanted to subject proud Albion to French hegemony. Next, it appeared as a fat cow which incessantly gave milk and threatened to bury the British Isles under a greasy layer of expensive butter. Finally, it took on the form of the 'Brussels bureaucrats', who — in the EEC mythology of these anti-marketeers — are evil personified because they want to rob the British people of their democracy and because their criminal intentions go even further than those of the 'gnomes of Zurich', who are allegedly trying to keep Britain dependent on interest rates.

During de Gaulle's reign, fearful opponents of the EEC were able to take consolation from the fact that it was all just a dream and that the General would use his veto to prevent the worst. However, since he has disappeared from the scene, there has been the danger that, one day, the dream will become reality. The further the negotiations in Brussels progress, the more time anti-marketeers spend thinking up new deterrents to EEC membership with the aim of instilling fear into the British people and generating a mood of panic. They can congratulate themselves on their campaign to date, since their success poses a serious threat to Prime Minister Edward Heath. This time, Mr Heath has legitimate hopes of bringing negotiations in Brussels to a successful conclusion, but he must be afraid that a majority in the Commons and amongst the British people may prevent British entry from going ahead.

David and Goliath

The campaign waged by anti-marketeers against the Government, which supports entry, and against the leadership of the three Commons parties, who are also pro-EEC, looks like a battle between David and Goliath. What David lacks in strength, he makes up for in speed and in the confident belief that Goliath, with feet of clay, is unwisely relying on a consensus limited to Westminster. The majority of the population, on the other hand, supports the anti-Common Market organisations. These can build on the fact that, according to the latest Gallup poll, two thirds of the population do not want Britain to join the EEC and disapprove of the Government's application for membership.

Up to the early part of this year, a number of small organisations — such as the Anti-Common Market League and the Labour Committee for Safeguards on the Common Market — actively tried to encourage this complete reversal of the mood of the mid-1960s and to use it for their own ends. The EEC summit in The Hague in December 1969, which came out in favour of a new round of negotiations with Britain, taught opponents of the EEC, however, that they needed to combine and intensify their efforts in the face of the gathering storm. The anti-marketeers found a forceful leader in Douglas Jay, a former Labour President of the Board of Trade who had been dismissed from the Government in summer 1967 by the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson because he did not support Britain's application for entry. In February 1970, Mr Jay amalgamated all the anti-Common Market organisations to form the Common Market Safeguards Campaign.

Even united, these organisations have only some 10 000 members. They are an active minority vociferously marching at the head of the silent majority. They have such limited funds that they can afford only a small two-room office in London's elegant Park Lane, plus a Director and a secretary. The campaign is funded solely from the contributions of British people opposed to the EEC. Director Ron Leighton proudly exhibits the donations that have come in the morning post on a single day. Four cheques in all: one for a pound, one

for two pounds, one for five pounds, and one for twenty-five pounds, although many people send in only the minimum contribution of ten shillings. So the organisation's funds look pathetic compared with the financial resources of supporters of the EEC. The European Movement, which campaigns for entry into the EEC, receives an annual subsidy equivalent to just under seventy thousand German marks from the Foreign Office budget. Last year alone, it received the equivalent of some four million German marks in donations.

A few shillings' sacrifice

The difference between the levels of donations does not, however, constitute a barometer of public opinion. The Safeguards Campaign is mainly supported by ordinary British people who hand over a few shillings so that they will not have to pay higher EEC food prices. The European Movement, on the other hand, receives its donations mainly from industry, which is in favour of entry because it hopes to benefit from the larger European market. Despite this, there is no social division and no party-political dividing line between the two organisations. Supporters and opponents of EEC entry come from all walks of life and from all the political parties. The European Movement is led by Conservatives such as the former British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Harlech, Churchill's son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, and the former Labour Foreign Secretary, George Brown, now Lord George Brown. The anti-Common Market campaign boasts an even wider spread of Left and Right. Its patrons include far-left trade unionists such as the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Jack Jones, and reactionary politicians such as the Conservative MP Sir Gerald Nabarro.

Despite their limited funds, the Common Market Safeguards Campaign has much greater influence over the public than the European Movement. Admittedly, the Safeguards Campaign also has it easier than the 'Europeans', since all it needs to do is to heighten the fears and worries of the British people. Even the Government has to admit that entry into the EEC will mean higher food prices. Some of the campaign material favoured by opponents of the EEC therefore includes leaflets with statistics comparing food prices in Britain and the EEC. The European 'milch cow' has to serve both to frighten consumers and as a symbol of what is referred to as the EEC's absurd and senseless agricultural policy. According to one of these leaflets, the milch cow is too fat for Britain. The leaflet also mentions that there are some 24 million of these milch cows in the EEC and that prices of dairy products are kept artificially high, allegedly to guarantee the livelihoods of millions of small and inefficient German and French farmers.

Again, according to the leaflet, the transitional period for Britain, which has already been agreed in principle in Brussels, is unlikely to help the British to overcome their adjustment problems. It says that they have the choice only between sudden death and gradual throttling.

Threatening the people with the EEC's high butter and meat prices has its drawbacks, however. In the first place, food prices are continually going up in Britain as well; in the second place, adjustment to EEC price levels would be a slow process. Opponents of the EEC cannot therefore expect their campaign weapon to continue to act as a deterrent in the longer term. They have, therefore, been quick to start fighting on a second, political front where they consider there is even more to fear. This is the threat that Britain would be dependent on the 'undemocratic' EEC Commission in Brussels or even that the EEC would, in time, become a confederation in which Britain would lose its national independence and become a federal state like California, Pennsylvania or the Ukraine. Not only would the most hallowed of all British institutions, the House of Commons, have to forfeit its independence, but the Queen would also have to yield precedence to a 'President of Europe'.

Just a pipe dream

One of the leaflets also gives an explicit warning not to indulge in the pipe dream that Britain's politicians and officials might take over political leadership of the EEC after entry. According to the author, William Pickles, the EEC's political machine is tailored to French interests. He concludes from this that not even the best British brains could change that, any more than the Germans and French can learn to think or behave like the British.

Ron Leighton does not, however, believe that the political arguments against membership should replace the dwindling economic ones. His view is that the political reasons now take precedence because the economic debate has already been won. In the meantime, there is a completely different reason for moving the battle to the political front. As Decision Day draws near, so it becomes all the more important for Leighton and his friends to ensure that there is a majority against entry in the Commons.

Here again, the Common Market Safeguards Campaign leaves no argument to chance. It maintains that signing the Treaties of Rome will curtail the Commons' decision-making authority and power to levy taxes. For example, under the Treaties, no Member State may withdraw unilaterally from the EEC. According to British constitutional tradition, however, the House of Commons cannot make such a commitment because its decisions are valid for only one legislative period, and every newly elected Parliament is completely at liberty to overturn the decisions made by the previous one. The Government is also aware of this obstacle, and it has asked two former Lord Chancellors, one Conservative and one Labour, for an opinion on this. Both gave a judgement of Solomon: the Commons could decide to withdraw from the EEC but, if this were to be done against the will of the other partners, it could do so only in breach of international law.

It is more difficult to refute the EEC opponents' argument that, according to British tradition, this Parliament has no mandate to determine Britain's entry into the EEC, because membership was not part of the last election campaign and, hence, the electorate did not vote on it. In their election manifestos, both parties committed themselves only to opening negotiations. Before the vote on entry, the Safeguards Campaign is therefore calling for new elections, or a referendum, or a free Commons vote. Leighton points to the latest Gallup poll, according to which 42 % of respondents are in favour of a referendum, 23 % in favour of new elections and 15 % in favour of a free vote. In other words, a total of 80 % support his organisation's demands.

New elections would, however, give a clear indication of the people's choice only if one of the two major parties were to contest the election campaign on a clear 'No' to EEC membership. As things stand, that party could only be Labour, and Leighton and his team are endeavouring to persuade the party to stand on a 'No' platform. At the party conference in October 1971, they hope to achieve what they nearly achieved at the October 1970 conference. By then, they also expect the 'No' camp in the parliamentary party to have gained the upper hand — just under half the Labour MPs are already on their side.

If opponents of the EEC in the Labour Party should not, however, be able to win the others over, the Safeguards Campaign intends to step up its call for a referendum. Although the referendum is not part of British constitutional tradition, the Commons is sovereign and can decide what it likes, including whether or not to hold a referendum. A small but prominent and determined band of politicians in both parties has already taken up this call but has no prospect of success. Anti-marketeters and the waverers are more likely to succeed with their call for a 'free vote', where MPs are not subject to the party whip. Opposition leader Harold Wilson would be happy with a free vote only if he did not have to come down on one side or the other and risk splitting the party. Prime Minister Edward Heath can at least be reminded of his election promise that he will allow anti-marketeters a free vote on grounds of conscience.

Mr Heath will no longer be able to be that generous, however. It is estimated that there are between 30 and 50 opponents of the EEC in the parliamentary Conservative party. At all events, the number is higher than that of the government majority, which is just 30 at present. Mr Heath is, therefore, dependent on the small band of EEC supporters in the Labour Party, of whom there are thought to be 60. It is at least arguable whether — like their leader, former Chancellor Roy Jenkins — they are all willing to risk splitting the Party over the vote on EEC entry. So Ron Leighton is gloating over the fact that Mr Heath will not really have the support of the Commons.

At the moment, the Government is indeed more concerned over what is happening on the back benches than over how negotiations are proceeding in Brussels. Ultimately, those who caution that Mr Heath has already left the anti-marketeters a clear field for too long and has been too slow in launching the propaganda campaign to change voters' minds could be proved right. Number Ten does not want to give the go-ahead for such a campaign until there has been a decisive breakthrough in Brussels, however. Until then, Mr Heath

is leaving it to his Europe Minister, Geoffrey Rippon, to spread optimism while he still leaves himself an escape route, should the negotiations end in deadlock.