

Letter from Tony Benn to Sicco Mansholt (28 March 1972)

Caption: On 28 March 1972, British Labour MP, Tony Benn, writes a letter to Sicco Mansholt, President of the European Commission, in which he sets out the reasons for Labour's opposition to the accession of the United Kingdom to the European common market.

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Letter from Tony Benn to Sicco Mansholt (28 March 1972)

House of Commons
London, SW1

March 28, 1972

Dear Dr. Mansholt:

Your press conference in Brussels on Monday was widely covered in the British press, including your comments on the policy of the British Labour Party towards entry into the Communities.

You are reported as saying that you are « ashamed to see my Socialist friends adopt such a negative attitude »; that « there is no reason why the Socialists in Britain could not accept the terms »; and, later of our « stupidity ».

You are entitled to your own opinion. But you also have a duty both to understand and to explain the reasons why the Labour Party has taken the view it has taken.

The entire British Labour movement, by clear majorities, at the Trades Union Congress, the annual conference, amongst Labour M.Ps, on the National Executive Committee and in the Shadow Cabinet agreed to oppose entry on two grounds.

First that the present terms were unfair and unfavourable; and second that on a matter of such historic importance the people should be consulted.

The peoples of Denmark, Norway, Ireland and France are to have a vote. The British people are to have the decision forced upon them. We are therefore demanding a general election, or failing that some other method of consultation.

The British Labour party has always been internationalist, but its policy is democratically decided; and in this case it is also championing the rights of the British people, as a whole, to have their say.

If Britain is dragged in without its consent we would lose before we entered our traditions of democracy which the communities so notably lack in their present structures.

Instead of calling us stupid you should be supporting our demands, with your authority, and insisting as President of the Commission, that the British Government allows us all to choose our own future.

Yours fraternally
Anthony Wedgwood Benn

Dr. S. Mansholt
President of the European Commission
Brussels