

'Taking that chance' from Der Spiegel (12 July 1971)

Caption: On 12 July 1971, German weekly Der Spiegel considers the information campaign launched by British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, in an attempt to convince his compatriots that the idea of the United Kingdom's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) is well-founded.

Source: Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. Augstein, Rudolf ; Herausgeber Engel K., Johannes; Gaus, Günter. 12.07.1971, Nr. 29; 25. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein KG. "Jetzt packen", p. 64-65.

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Taking that chance

Following completion of the EEC negotiations on entry, UK Prime Minister Edward Heath has launched a publicity campaign on the home front. There is clearly an acute need for this as the majority of Britons are still opposed to joining.

The book in question promises to become a best-seller. Hours before it went on sale last Wednesday, Londoners had already formed a 140-metre queue outside Her Majesty's Stationery Office in High Holborn. Half an hour after sales began, customers had eagerly grabbed 6 500 copies from the hands of sales staff.

The best-seller is parliamentary publication No 4715, issued by Her Majesty's Government and sold at a price of 25 new pence (DM 2.20). It is called 'The United Kingdom and the European Communities'.

As long as his negotiations with the Six were continuing, Premier Heath could not campaign at home without weakening his negotiating position. But now, three weeks after the successful conclusion of negotiations and four months before the crucial vote in the Commons on Britain's EEC entry, Heath has launched his campaign with this 45-page book to win the country's Euro-sceptics over to Britain's entry into the Economic Community. A popularised version of the document will be available to the public from this Monday in all of Britain's post offices.

At the same time, publication of the White Paper marks the start of an enormous publicity campaign, which Edward Heath hopes will persuade doubting Britons that (in the words of the White Paper) 'there is no alternative grouping of countries' that can offer Britain 'the same opportunities' for 'national security and prosperity' as the EEC.

This propaganda will use all the media and meetings will be held in even the most remote Welsh and Scottish villages. Pamphlets will seek to bring the undecided, the doubters and the opponents into the pro-European fold. The former middle-distance world-record holder and Postmaster General, Chris Chataway, has been given special responsibility for coordinating the EEC promotion drive on radio and television.

A campaign is certainly needed, for an opinion poll conducted on behalf of *The Daily Telegraph* last week — prior to publication of the White Paper — showed that UK support for EEC membership still stood at only 25 %, or 40 % in a BBC survey. The number of opponents varied between 51 and 57 % depending on the poll.

Certainly, in the Commons, Heath can be reasonably sure of getting enough votes for EEC entry. For whilst it is true that some 40 Tory MPs are EEC opponents, they will probably vote, albeit reluctantly, in favour of joining for fear that their Prime Minister might suffer a defeat, possibly precipitating the premature dissolution of the Commons.

And yet Heath wants to persuade not only a majority of MPs to support entry but also a majority of voters. Here he has an eye to the next general elections, which must be held at the latest two-and-a-half years after the date of accession, which will be 1 January 1973.

Heath has every reason to be happy with the start of his publicity campaign. All British newspapers published pages of extracts from this skilfully compiled White Paper, *The Times* and *The Guardian* even publishing the document in full. A *Times* commentary went even further than the White Paper, describing a British 'No' to the EEC as 'a form of suicide'.

Speaking on radio and television last Thursday, Heath presented the White Paper arguments in a nutshell. He appealed to the British people, saying, 'Here it is, the chance to regain our greatness: now let's take it!'

Finally, the Prime Minister has even drawn support from former Labour Foreign Secretary, Lord George-Brown, whose party is deeply divided on the question of entry. To the annoyance of many of his party colleagues, the Labour lord declared 'that the agreements obtained in Brussels look better than some of us

dared to hope just a couple of months ago.'

Over the next few months, it will mainly be Conservative ministers and backbenchers — foregoing their summer holidays in favour of the EEC campaign — who will be bearing the brunt of the day-to-day promotion effort.

Equipped with crib sheets from party headquarters, they will be tramping the length and breadth of the land extolling the advantages of an EEC market of 254 million consumers. They will be explaining to the British electorate that (according to the White Paper) if Britain does not join the EEC, its power 'to influence the Communities would steadily diminish, while the Communities' power to affect our future would as steadily increase.'

The government hopes to dispel the entry-angst of the British. The Italian Prime Minister, Emilio Colombo, recently heard at first hand that this was often simply based on a lack of information. When he spoke about the EEC to Members of Parliament in London, one asked whether Elizabeth could still remain Queen after entry.

An appalled Colombo confided afterwards to an Italian colleague, 'if such ignorance prevails even in Parliament, there must be an even greater need for enlightenment in the country.'