

Robin Turton, Why I voted against entry into the Common Market (February 1972)

Caption: In February 1972, Sir Robin Turton, Conservative Member of the UK Parliament, explains why he opposed the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities.

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Why I voted against entry into the Common Market (February 1972)

by The Rt. Hon. Sir Robin Turton, K.B.E., M.C., M.P.

[...]

WHY I VOTED AGAINST ENTRY

What was the most powerful argument that led me to vote against the decision to join the Common Market?

Perhaps after forty-two years in Parliament I may be excused for having an inordinate pride in our Parliamentary system. The countries of Western Europe also have Parliaments, but there is this difference; we work on an unwritten constitution based on the supremacy of the Queen in Parliament, the E.E.C. countries on a written constitution. On acceding to the Treaty of Rome we shall have to change over to a written constitution.

Parliamentary proceedings are based on the responsibility of Ministers and on the right of Representatives of the people to challenge the responsible acts of the Executive.

From the moment of accession Parliament will be shorn of a considerable part of its activities, because the decisions will be taken, not by the Executive appointed by the Sovereign, but by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers sitting in Brussels.

Though there is a European Assembly under Article 137 of the Treaty it is only advisory and has no decision-making functions, so cannot be truly regarded as a Parliament.

No Parliamentary Scrutiny

The extent of the loss of British Parliamentary Sovereignty can be assessed by a look at the European Communities Bill that has been recently presented to Parliament. Under Clause 2(1) all decisions and regulations of the European Commission and all clauses of the Treaty of Rome are to *be ipso facto* embodied in England Law, without any Parliamentary scrutiny, even if they conflict with the existing law of the land. This photo-copying of legislation is not only an innovation but is in direct conflict with the principles of Parliamentary Government. Further, the clause is so worded as to include all future decisions and regulations of the Commission.

Under our Parliamentary system, new laws have to go through the scrutiny of the two Houses of Parliament in the five legislative stages, and exercise of major delegated powers by Ministers have to be scrutinised by a Committee, and do not come into law until they have been passed by a vote of both Houses. The European Communities Bill proposes that there shall be no Parliamentary scrutiny at all.

This has provided a very great shock to Constitutionalists; it is fair to say that they should have anticipated this consequence and therefore have avoided the shock. But undoubtedly the publication of the 42 volumes of regulations and the presentation of this Bill have alarmed public opinion. The most recent Gallup Poll shows that there are now 48% of the British people against entry.

The effect on the House of Commons is not limited to its legislative work.

The rules of Parliament are designed to permit Members of Parliament to seek a redress of grievances; they are based on the doctrine of the responsibility of the Executive, for which Ministers answer.

Should the Bill be passed, a great area of administration will be outside their responsibility and vested in the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. This will restrict the field of Parliamentary Questions, Motions, and Debate.

I remember the outcry after the first Nationalisation Bills were passed, when Ministers were refusing to answer questions on the ground that they referred to the day-to-day activities of the Nationalised industries, for which the Boards, and not themselves were responsible. **When the extent of the limitation of the power of Parliament is fully recognised there is going to be such a surge of opinion against entry that the Nation will never forgive Parliamentarians of any party who have voted for it.**

Britain's Relationship with the E.E.C.

My vote on October 28th was no criticism of the considerable achievements of the E.E.C. The unity of Western Europe is as desirable to me as anyone, but my disagreement is on what should be Britain's relationship to that unity. The problem was crystallised in two of M. Pompidou's questions to Mr. Heath last summer:

First question: "Do you accept the thing which lies at the very root of the Common Market, namely Community preference whereby members obtain their supplies in the first place from within the Community?"

Fourth question, which was probably the most important of all: "I asked the Prime Minister what he thought of Europe, in other words whether Britain was really determined to become European, whether Britain, which is an island, was determined to tie herself to the Continent, and whether she was prepared, consequently, to loosen her ties with the open sea, towards which she had always looked."

Britain as a trading nation with 60 per cent of her visible, and 66 per cent of her invisible trade outside Europe has at present a preferential trading relationship with the Commonwealth preferential area which is of vital importance to a country that is short of raw materials, and has not a sufficient area of agricultural land from which to support herself entirely with food. In exchange she obtains preferential trading advantages in those countries in other continents, many of which are developing countries. The proposal is that we should end this Commonwealth preferential system and in its stead adopt a community preference policy, based on the Common Market agricultural policy. This is to jeopardise 60 per cent of our trade in exchange for an expectation of an increase in the 21 per cent of our trade that at present goes to the E.E.C.

U.K. trade is geared on an infra-structure that has been built up over many years extending outside Europe to the four other continents. Indeed, it is this infra-structure that has permitted us in the majority of years to balance our trading accounts whilst we have run deficits on visible trade. Equally this infra-structure has been of benefit to the Commonwealth countries, both developed and developing.

Rich and Poor

If we are to accept M. Pompidou's conditions, then we opt out of this role. Is it unfair to ask what country takes our place? The world is rapidly dividing between north and south, the rich and the poor countries. So far, somewhat inadequately, with slender resources, we have acted as the bridge. The young developing countries, especially in the Commonwealth, have relied on Britain as a preferential market for their primary products, and as a source from which they can obtain the necessary public and private capital for their development. But if, before we can import any food or goods from the Commonwealth or from our traditional markets, we have to be satisfied that none is on offer in the Community, these primary producers would have to look elsewhere for their markets.

There are two possible solutions, one is to regionalise trade. To a certain degree attempts have already been made to follow this course (LAFTA; CARIFTA). But the results have not been satisfactory. Further, the end of such a policy would be to exaggerate the differences between North and South, to add to trade barriers, to concentrate development in the highly industrialised countries of Europe and North America, and to leave

the vast majority of the world's population without markets for their products and without the necessary capital for their development.

The second alternative is to allow these primary producers to be swept into the orbit of the new imperialist powers, Russia, China, and the United States. The United States' capacity in this role is limited. She is herself a large primary producer, exports less of her gross domestic product than other industrialised nations and is burdened with heavy military commitments. The recent weakness of the dollar underlines her incapacity. This leaves the two Communist powers, Russia and China. The recent news of Pakistan's departure from the Commonwealth on the Bangladesh issue is significant. Mr. Bhutto has weighed up the situation, and has come to the conclusion that now Britain is reorientating herself to a European policy, Pakistan must look to China for any help out of her difficulties.

To me, this problem of the Third World is the greatest this generation has to face. It is inconceivable that the world can survive if the rich countries band themselves together with artificially high prices for their primary products, whilst the poorer developing countries are left outside the gate to rely on charity or to starve, unless they can be sponsored by a Communist imperial power whose aim and object is to destroy the foundations of Western civilisation.

Criticism of C.A.P.

This brings me to a criticism of the Common Agricultural Policy. As a farmer, I am sympathetic to the claim that the primary producers in the industrialised countries should enjoy incomes comparable to their counterparts in industry. But I cannot defend a system that fixes artificially high target price for agricultural products with no relation to world prices, and achieves this distortion by a system for variable levies and product at any price that is not higher than the Community price. By thus artificially raising the price of food in the industrial countries, the less well-off are forced to limit their consumption of the more desirable foods, which decreases the market for all primary producers.

I think that we should heed the warning uttered on January 20th at the UNCTAD 3 symposium at The Hague that the effect of the Common Agricultural Policy on the developing world would grow much worse. The self-sufficiency implicit in the Policy is increasingly limiting the markets for the agricultural surpluses of the Third World. On that occasion Dr. Boerman, Director General of the Food Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, maintained that it was scandalous that the Community was not a member of the International Sugar Agreement.

In Britain we have hitherto relied on a system of guaranteed prices and deficiency payments that supports the farmer's income at the tax-payer's expense, and thereby enables the consumers to enjoy the advantage of obtaining their food at world prices. For twenty-four years we have benefited from that agricultural policy, and it has enabled our agricultural industry to expand faster than most of our other industries. If we enter the E.E.C., we must scrap that policy, and as a nation we shall have to make heavy financial contributions, and our consumers will have to pay substantially more for their food when we change over to the disastrous Common Agricultural Policy.

Some have suggested that if we enter the Community, we can radically change the Common Agricultural Policy. There is no foundation for this suggestion, as M. Pompidou made clear on TV on 22nd December, 1971:

"If the Agricultural Common Market were to be weakened, I can tell you that there would then be no hope of economic and monetary union, no more prospect of political union. The E.E.C. must not peter out into a vague Free Trade area. Europe must assert its political personality in front of the whole world, including its friends and allies."

"Open Seas"

Finally, let me turn to my views on what should be the relationship between Britain and Western Europe.

Geographically we are close together; ideologically, from many of the countries, we are not far apart, though clearly in our forms of Government we differ greatly.

It seems senseless in this 20th Century, in these days of multinational corporations, that we should maintain barriers, tariff or non-tariff, against a free exchange of our industrial products. Equally, without any radical diminution of national sovereignty, we can co-operate in research, development and production. But these activities must be outward-looking and not inward-looking. It would be wrong to confine our offer of freedom of trade within a segment of Europe, or merely to accord preferential trading terms to former Colonies of the Six or Ten. The bridge across the Atlantic must be maintained, and the Continents of Asia, Africa and Australasia must be as much our preoccupation as the Continent of Europe. The Six have recognised this in their adoption to a limited extent of the UNCTAD policy of non-reciprocal preferences. But the problem of the poor developing countries; on the solution of which may well depend the survival of our civilisation, demands, not a negative policy of Community Preference, but a positive policy of the open seas.

As Sir Winston Churchill once wisely remarked: "Britain will always have to choose between Europe and the open seas. She will always choose the open seas."