

Common Market Safeguards Campaign, The Truth about the Common Market (1971)

Caption: In 1971, the British pressure group Common Market Safeguards Campaign publishes a booklet in which it identifies the negative economic and political impact of the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities.

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The Truth about the Common Market (1971)

Political Freedom

Joining the Common Market in its present form would bring both serious damage to Britain's standard of living, and the loss of her national independence and political freedom. The Common Market is too narrow and parochially-minded a group in which to submerge a nation with Britain's world-wide trading interests and political ties. We should be far wiser, therefore, to foster good international relations through the democratic authorities intended for this purpose — the U.N., the Commonwealth, EFTA, the OECD and the rest — and wait to see whether the policies of the Common Market are going to be drastically altered and liberalised in the future. If they are going to be changed, the time to join will be after they have been.

Politically, the argument against Britain joining the Common Market in its present form is overwhelming. Membership would be bound to mean the loss of our national independence, and the reality of our Parliamentary system and political freedom. For the Common Market is not, as some have wrongly supposed, a democratic organisation like the UN, the World Bank, NATO, EFTA, the OECD, or any of the international organisations we have already joined. It is authoritarian in character, and likely to develop into an outright Federal State. Thus genuine political independence is incompatible with membership of it.

Undemocratic

In three fundamental respects, the Common Market differs from a democratic organisation like the UN or EFTA: —

(1) The UN, EFTA and all democratic authorities are finally governed by a Council or Assembly of Ministers, with the constitutional Government of each member State represented on it.

The Common Market is largely governed by an un-elected "Commission" of officials, who are not responsible to any Parliament, and not representative of any member country. They are to a very great extent not even responsible to the Market's Council of Ministers, since that Council is seldom in session, and can only act on proposals from the Commission.

(2) International authorities like the UN and EFTA can only influence international relations, and cannot control the internal affairs of member countries. They can in no case legislate for a country's internal affairs.

The Common Market Commission, however, as well as its Council of Ministers, can legislate directly for the internal affairs of the member countries. This means that, if Britain signed the Rome Treaty, the decisions of the bureaucratic Commission in Brussels would automatically become law in Britain, and be enforceable by the Police and the Courts, without the British Parliament or British electorate ever having been consulted. Indeed, the British Parliament and electorate would have no power to reverse or amend a law made by the Brussels Commission, however much they disliked it.

(3) Britain or any other country could in the last resort resign from a democratic body like the UN, NATO or EFTA, if the British people found its decisions and conduct intolerable, and no longer wished to belong.

But a decision to sign the Rome Treaty, and join the Common Market, is irrevocable. There is no legal or peaceful way of resigning, if membership is felt to be intolerable, or even if the Governments of the other partners, for instance, turn into dictatorships. A country wishing to secede would be in the position of the Southern States of the US in 1860-61, or Southern Ireland in 1919-20.

It is for these reasons that membership of the Common Market in its present form would deprive the British public of democratic control over their own lives and liberties.

Federation?

Some imagine that this basic difficulty can be overcome by altering the constitution of the Common Market, and setting up a genuine Parliament exercising real power over the bureaucracy, and directly elected by the public of the member countries. But this inevitably, and quite inescapably, leads on to another and much worse difficulty. **A directly elected Parliament must mean a political Federation, and the extinction of the national independence of the member country.** Britain, France, Germany and Italy would cease to be independent nations with control over their own affairs, and would become instead mere States like California, Pennsylvania, or the Ukraine, in a Federal Union.

This dilemma is inescapable. Either the proposed Parliament would have no genuine power of control over the bureaucracy; or else a Federal State would supersede national independence.

This dilemma does not of course exist in the case of a democratic organisation like the UN; but only arises when supranational bodies like the Brussels Commission are set up.

In fact, the Common Market Six are now committed to moving steadily towards the creation of a Federal State. It is almost certainly only a matter of time until a directly elected Parliament is set up which would (if we joined) supersede the British and other national Parliaments, and in time the Governments as well. The British people must realise that this is the road which they are being asked to take by those who urge them to join the Common Market now.

It may be that the world will have progressed one day to the point at which Britain might prudently risk merging her tried democratic institutions with those of other countries with a record of proved democratic stability. But this point has certainly not been reached yet; and the power of both Communist and neo-fascist groups is strong enough in certain parts of the Common Market to make the prospect of future democratic stability in those countries at least questionable. Experience argues conclusively that this is not the time for Britain to risk her own democratic stability on such a reckless gamble. Nor, if a risk were to be taken, is there any reason to think that this particular group of countries, judged by experience, is the right one to join. It is the wrong group as well as the wrong time.

The Threat to Living Standards

Such are the overwhelming political reasons against a hasty attempt to join the Common Market in its present form and with its present policies. Some might argue — and in 1961-62, Mr. Harold Macmillan did argue — that great political risks had to be taken for the sake of the great economic advantage to be gained by joining. Many British people will feel that no economic gain, however great, would justify the loss of national independence and Parliamentary control over our own affairs. But the extraordinary truth is that the supposed economic gain is now admitted by everyone to be a mistake and an illusion; and it is agreed by common consent that a very heavy and grievous economic price would have to be paid for the privilege of sacrificing our liberties. Only now is it beginning to be realised by the British public as a whole that **they are being asked to sacrifice at one and the same time both their political liberties and their standard of living, and in return for no real advantage whatever.**

Dearer Food

The chief effect on Britain's economic life of joining the Common Market would be a heavy and permanent rise in the cost of living here, and therefore a fall in the standard of living below what we would otherwise have enjoyed. This would be due to the policy of dear food and high agricultural protection, designed to maintain antiquated and inefficient farming, which is the basis of the whole economic and social system in the Common Market countries. Most of the main foodstuffs would become much dearer for the British

housewife to buy.

The Government's White Paper of July, 1971 (Cmd. 4715), "The UK and the European Communities", admits that the cost of food would be forced up by 16% during the six years' "transitional period" alone. Since import levies have already been placed on Britain's food imports in anticipation of joining the EEC by the Heath Government, this means that the real rise in food prices would be close to 20%. They would stay permanently that much higher thereafter than they would have been if we had not joined.

The White Paper also admits that some prices, including butter, cheese and beef, would rise "significantly more than the average" — in fact by 50% or 100%. Bread, flour and eggs would rise by about 20%.

Here are some comparisons of present food prices in the shops in the UK and the Common Market:

Food Basket (*Financial Times*, Dec. 9, 1970)
(US \$)

Paris	23.99
Rome	23.97
Brussels	23.00
Dusseldorf	22.39
London	16.98

(*Daily Express*, July 10, 1971)
new pence

	Belgium	France	Germany	Holland	Britain
Beef steak, lb.	77	78	92	80	65
Pork chops, lb.	44	48	41	42	35
Lamb, lb.	—	74	—	—	37
Chickens, lb	26	21	19	17	18
Butter, lb	41	42	40	39½	19
Cheese, lb	30	43	46	32	21
Eggs, a dozen	32	29	28	23	24
Bread, a loaf	5	7	9	5½	5½

Here are some further comparisons between British and Italian prices:

(Letter to *Financial Times*, 14th April, 1971)
new pence per lb.

	Italy	London
Coffee	70-96	47½
Margarine	26	10
Sugar	8	4½
Sardines, fresh	18	8
Sole, fresh	76	38

Higher Cost of Living

Many of those who have spent holidays on the Continent will say that prices are even higher there than those given above. Even on the White Paper's figures, however, the Government admits that the rise in food prices alone would push up living costs by 4%–5% above the level it would otherwise have reached.

But unhappily this would not be the only change due to joining the Common Market which would raise our living costs. We should also be compelled — the Confederation of British Industry says "certainly" — to introduce the Common Market's "Value Added Tax." The Common Market version of this would be a flat-rate tax falling, unlike our Purchase Tax, on all the necessities of life including food, fuel, light, and possibly rent, books, newspapers, etc. as well. It would no longer be under the control of the British Parliament. The C.B.I. estimates that this would push our living costs up further to a total rise of about 6% altogether.

This rise would come on top of the rises which normally occur in any case year by year in a fully employed modern economy. It is deceiving the public to say that this rise of 6% or so compares with a rise of 4% or 5% a year which has become normal nowadays. The rise due to joining the Common Market would come on top of this; would be unnecessary; and would leave food prices and living costs permanently that much higher than they would have been or need have been. Moreover for old-age pensioners, large families and low wage-earners, the rise in living costs would be more like 10%-15%.

The rise would be permanent, because the system of dear food prevailing in the Common Market is deeply imbedded in the social, economic and political system in those countries, and goes back generations before the signing of the Rome Treaty. The majority Parties of Germany, Italy and France, the real authors and guardians of the Rome Treaty, draw their votes from the agricultural population. A cut in food prices in these countries, which would bring them down near to British levels, is therefore politically impossible in the foreseeable future. Every attempt to achieve it has failed.

The Contrast in Farm Policies

For there is a fundamental difference between Britain's modern food and agricultural policy and the antiquated system practised by the Six. Britain imports about half her food at the lowest world prices from the most efficient producers of grain, feeding stuffs, meat and dairy produce in the world; who are mostly to be found, for geographical and climatic reasons, in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. The British consumer is allowed to buy food at the price set by efficient producers in these countries. The British farmer's income is then maintained by grants from the British Exchequer, which enable him to practise efficient and reasonably profitable farming. This has given us a combination of relatively low food prices, a relatively low cost of living, a modern and efficient farming industry, and a more reasonable income for farmers and farm workers than they get on the Continent.

The Common Market system is just the opposite. Very high taxes and levies on food at the frontier shut out almost entirely the food products of the efficient producers in the outside world. If world prices fall, then the Common Market import taxes automatically rise to prevent the population within the Market from getting the benefit, just as did the British corn duties before the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Under this system, the consumer is deprived of the benefit of reasonably priced food, and is forced to pay the cost of supporting the high-cost, inefficient farmers who are enabled by the system to hang on to a precarious living.

No other solution is possible in the Common Market countries, because widespread tax evasion, particularly in France and Italy, makes it impossible for agriculture to be supported as in Britain by direct tax revenue from the Exchequer. So, the Common Market's so-called "Common Agricultural Policy" succeeds in maintaining very high prices for consumers, an inefficient and discontented farming community, and a ban on imports from the outside world which damages the producing countries also.

Our system, in short, is a good one, and the Common Market's is thoroughly bad. The suggestion that we should substitute theirs for ours, as we should have to if we joined, is outrageous. Some say with little knowledge of Common Market affairs that the Six will have to change its food policies. There is no sign of this whatever; but if it ever does change, the time for us to consider joining is after the change and not before.

Effect on the Pensioner

Forcing the Common Market's food policies and prices on Britain would have disastrous effects both socially and economically. First, the steep rise of 20% or 25% in food prices would hit the poorest families far the hardest. Retired people, those living on fixed incomes, and families with several children — already least well off — would feel the pinch worst. Probably, active wage-earners and salary-earners would hit back by demanding higher pay in money terms. But the old people — over 5 millions in retirement now in Britain — would be powerless.

Nor could the Government relieve their distress by automatically raising pension levels, because the Budget revenue raised by the new Common Market taxes, though paid by the British people, would have to be handed back by the rules of the Common Market into the Brussels Agricultural Fund and not to the British Exchequer. A permanently lower living standard for almost all old people would be one certain result. The Common Market type of Value-Added Tax would make things worse, and the net effect would be a major shift in the tax burden on to those least able to bear it.

Balance of Payments Burden

Fully as bad, however, as the social injustice inflicted on the British people would be the heavy economic burden on our whole economic future and balance of payments in particular. First, Britain's total imports would cost much more than they need have done because of the switch from cheap to dear food. We should be forced to buy dearer wheat, feeding stuffs, meat, butter and cheese at a high price from the Common Market, instead of at a much lower price from the Commonwealth and North America. We should have to pay a great deal more, perhaps twice as much, for the food we already buy from the Six, because we now get it at a subsidised export price; but if we join, we would have to pay the extortionate internal price which the Common Market charges to its own unfortunate consumers.

And, on top of this, in so far as we still bought food from efficient producers in the Commonwealth or America, we should be forced to tax such imports, and pay the whole proceeds of the tax to the Common Market's Fund. In addition even to that, we should have to pay over to these funds most of our Customs Duties and most of the revenue from Purchase Tax or VAT (compelling us, incidentally, to raise other taxes at home).

These payments would be made outside the British currency area, and so would cost us just as much in foreign currency as the same value of imports. The total of this burden from higher food prices and levies would start at about £500m or £600m a year, rising in later years. This in itself is as large as any current balance of payments deficit incurred by Britain in recent times.

Loss of Exports

But it would only be the beginning of the damage to our economy. We should also lose exports on a massive scale all over the world. This would be certain, for two reasons. First, since we were shutting out the products we now buy from Commonwealth and EFTA countries, these countries would cancel the free-entry or preference they now give to British exports. Secondly, the higher cost of living in Britain would lead to higher wage rates, higher export prices, and a further loss of exports from this cause.

If we do not join the Common Market, we shall continue to enjoy tariff-free entry for about two-thirds of the over £2,000m. of exports which we now send to the Commonwealth and the EFTA countries which do not

wish to join the Common Market. Total cancellation of the easy entry now enjoyed by this huge slice of our exports in these countries would lose us at least £200m. a year of exports. It could very easily be much more.

The main Commonwealth preference area countries are among Britain's largest export markets and our exports to these countries have been rising rapidly in recent years. The record is as follows:—

British Exports To		
(£m)		
	1967	1969
Canada	220	309
Australia	256	321
S. Africa	261	291
New Zealand	100	121
Hong Kong	62	89
Total Preference		
Area	1900	2217

In addition, the extra rise of 6% or so in our living costs would force up wage rates and prices in our exporting industries, which would affect the whole £7,000m. a year of British exports. From this cause, we would have to expect a further loss of at least £250m. a year of exports. Within the Common Market itself, our exports would increase; but our imports would increase even more; because we should suffer a rise in labour costs, and the Six would not.

Therefore, on the balance of our total imports and exports of non-food products all over the world, we should be worse off to the extent of something like another £500m. a year, (in addition to the higher cost of imported food and levy payments).

This is because the loss of exports in the world outside the Common Market would be much greater than the gain within it, and there would of course be a large increase in imports also. The CBI itself admits that the loss of exports in the Commonwealth alone — not counting the loss in EFTA and the rest of the world — would about outweigh the gain in the Six. It follows from this that we must on balance be worse off.

And on top of all that, it is one of the additional burdens of the Rome Treaty that member countries have to cancel all control on exports of capital. Britain would have to remove at once the control on exports of capital which has been in force since 1939, and permit individuals, banks and other firms to take their funds abroad just as they pleased without regard to the effect on sterling. This strange clause in the Rome Treaty could well cost us several hundred millions sterling on the capital account of the balance of payments in addition to the load described above.

£1,000 Million a Year Burden

Altogether, therefore, **those who estimate that the permanent cost of joining the Common Market would be a load of £1,000m. a year on our balance of payments are probably being pretty cautious.** In plain English, this means that Britain, after 20 years of struggle with the balance of payments, would then gratuitously inflict upon herself a heavier burden than we suffered at the outset of the period from the cost of the war itself.

Deflation and Slow Growth

But the load on the balance of payments would only be the beginning of the weakening of our economy, which would be likely to get worse from year to year. It is balance of payments deficits since 1945 which have constantly forced Governments to inflict freezes and squeezes upon us and slow down our economic growth. A further balance of payment load and chronic deficit would mean a lasting prospect of squeeze policies, deflation and industrial stagnation. It is precisely this which has weakened Britain in the last 20 years.

There are some who have tried to delude the British public by pretending that the Six have discovered some mystic secret of economic growth, which we could magically contract by joining. This is a pure myth. The truth is that **economic growth was higher in the Six in the five years before the Rome Treaty was signed than in the eight years afterwards** (5.3% a year against 4.8%).

Growth has also been higher in O.E.C.D. countries outside the Six than it has within the Six since the Rome Treaty was signed (5.1% outside and 4.8% inside the Common Market between 1960 and 1968). The idea that the Rome Treaty had something to do with economic growth in the Six is a simple deception practised on the British public by those who should have known better.

Living Standards

Equally false is the assertion, made so often as to be believed by some, that real wages and living standards today in the Common Market are higher than in Britain. This is another myth. All the figures show that it is completely untrue. This particular deception is practised by giving figures of **money** wages, and omitting to mention that the **cost of living** is very much higher in the Common Market countries. In point of fact, even money wages are higher in Britain than in any Common Market country except possibly West Germany. Here are the latest figures for men's money wages per hour in dollars, as calculated by the Common Market authorities themselves in a publication called "The Common Market and the Common Man":—

	\$
W. Germany	1.22
Britain	1.20
Belgium	1.15
Holland	1.09
France	0.93
Italy	0.79

Since living costs are 5% or 10% higher in the Common Market countries, and food prices 20%-25% higher, it follows from these figures that British real wages and living standards are higher than in any of these countries. They are a little higher than in Germany, and much higher than in Belgium, Holland, France or Italy. Our lower food prices and lower cost of living are, therefore, the main reasons for our higher living standard; and if we imposed the Six's food prices on ourselves, we should lose our advantage and sink to their levels.

Narrower Market

The final major economic consequence of Britain joining the Six in its present form would be this. Since the loss of exports would greatly exceed the gain, and there would be a big rise of competitive imports in our own home market, total sales by British industry in the world as a whole would be markedly less than they would have been. This follows from the calculation made both by the CBI and the Government's White Paper. But attempts have been made to conceal from the public the conclusion which inexorably follows from this: that the **total market for British industry in the world as a whole would be greatly narrowed by our joining the Common Market**. The simple truth is, though some have not yet understood it, that British industry's total sales would be lower as a result of joining than they would otherwise have been.

A further disagreeable consequence follows from this, which we all ought to face honestly. Owing to **the narrowing of the market for British industry, the economies of large-scale production and marketing would be progressively lost.** Though these advantages are sometimes exaggerated, they are none-the-less real. The loss of them, therefore, would mean that the secondary or "dynamic" effect of joining the Common Market would be as damaging, and as lasting, as the immediate consequences. They would steadily and progressively weaken our economy over the years.

Threat to the North And West

Not merely, however, would Britain's national livelihood as a whole be damaged. But joining the Common Market **would strike a particularly heavy blow at the areas which have been economically least favoured in recent years:** Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the North East, the North West and South West of England. It would both undermine the policies by which new **industry** and employment has been steered to these areas in recent years, and discriminate against **farmers** in the North and West. Much new industry, though less than is needed, has been successfully introduced into the Development Areas largely by the use of the Industrial Development Certificate control, which enables the British Government to refuse to grant an IDC for a firm to build a factory in the South East, but to grant it for one in a Development Area. A firm cannot circumvent this at present by threatening to take its new factory to Belgium or Holland, because the Government's Exchange Control would prevent it exporting its capital.

Double Blow

But signing the Rome Treaty means the total abandonment of this control. Any firm could call the Government's bluff by saying that if it were not given permission to build a factory in the South East, it would go to Antwerp or Rotterdam. Many would do so. This would undermine the whole of the present Development Area policy, just at the moment when natural industrial forces would be tending to push new industrial development to the Belgium-Holland-Lower Rhine area, which would tend to become the Midlands of the enlarged Common Market. No IDC control exists anywhere within the Six.

In these circumstances, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all the present Development Areas would suffer a loss of employment, which in a few years might well depress them into the condition of the 1930s.

At the same time, the Common Market agricultural policies, by forcing up the price of grain and feeding stuffs would favour cereal producers, and impoverish our cattle and dairy farmers. This, however, means helping the big grain farmers in the South and East, and **damaging the cattle, dairy and sheep fanners in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the South West.** Thus a heavy double blow would be struck at these most needy areas; and little or nothing could be done within Common Market rules to alleviate its severity.

Common Currency?

An even more disastrous possibility — at present being seriously discussed among the Six — would be the evolution of the Common Market towards a common currency. If this were to be adopted, the British people would entirely lose control over their own economic affairs, and in particular over the levels of employment and unemployment. When a nation has a separate currency, and it runs into a deficit in its dealings with the rest of the world, it can devalue the currency and so restore solvency and full employment.

But **if it has no separate currency, then the deficit shows itself by turning the uncompetitive country or region into a depressed area.** This is why Northern Ireland, and to some extent Scotland, have been underemployed areas in Britain in the last 20 years as have the Southern parts of Italy and Western parts of France. If the British Isles were to be united in a currency union with Western Europe, then not merely might the tendencies described above create depression and unemployment: but all power of correcting them would have been snatched out of our hands. Without control of its currency a nation cannot control its internal or external economic policy. This basic fact is little understood by those who talk glibly about a

currency union. It is not yet certain that the Common Market countries will adopt one. But the danger is there, and the proposal is already being strongly pressed.

Political Weakness

What is certain, however, is that the present trading and agricultural policies of the Common Market would drastically weaken Great Britain economically if we were compelled to adopt them. The persistent balance of payments deficit forced upon us would inevitably undermine our political as well as economic strength. The last 20 years' experience has shown that nations forced by deficit into becoming borrowers and debtors on the international scene soon lose their political influence. Beggars cannot be preachers in the political any more than the financial sphere. It is the **political weakening of Britain through the sapping of our economic strength which is probably the greatest danger of all which would result from our being forced into the Common Market.** It would be all the more insidious because it would be gradual: and most people would not realize what was happening until too late.

Alienating Our Friends

We should also be gravely weakened for another reason. At present Britain has excellent political and trading relations with our Commonwealth partners and with the Scandinavian countries and other members of EFTA. We now enjoy complete free trade with EFTA, and a very large measure of free trade with the Commonwealth.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand are among our very largest markets other than the United States; while only 20% of our trade is with the Common Market. Our trading and political relations with EFTA, in particular, are ideal from the British point of view; because they combine liberal trading policies with democratic control, impose no ban on our trading with the outside world, and leave a free choice for all members on agricultural policy. Our trade with EFTA has more than doubled in less than 10 years.

But if we joined the Common Market, and were forced — as we should be — to impose new tariffs and trading restrictions on the friendly countries of EFTA and the Commonwealth, we should inevitably alienate them as, a result. Most of the EFTA countries — Sweden, Switzerland and Finland in particular — are resentful of our persistent efforts to join the Common Market. They would all prefer, and rightly, to build EFTA until such time as the Common Market abandons its reactionary and supranational policies. So with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These are our best friends in the world in peace and war, but are bound to be alienated if we commit a deliberate one-sided breach of our close trading partnership with them. We have already lost valuable export markets in these countries by our loudly advertised efforts to join the Six.

To join in these circumstances, and on these terms, is to commit the political folly of alienating our best friends in the world unnecessarily, and for no good reason whatever.

The Better Way

Just because it would be completely unnecessary, the folly of such a course would be all the greater. All sorts of far better opportunities are open to Britain. We can foster and widen, for instance, the group of countries already practising the democratic and free trade principles of EFTA and the Commonwealth. We can work to ensure the opening of the markets of this area and the United States to the products of the poorer developing countries, rather than shutting them out of our own markets, as we should have to if we signed the Rome Treaty. We could invite the Common Market itself to reach a free-trade-area agreement, or at least a liberal trade treaty, with our own EFTA and Commonwealth system. Or, alternatively, we could work with the United States through GATT for further all-round tariff reductions all over the world, with special concessions for the developing countries.

All these possibilities are open to us. They would all do much good to many nations of the world and harm to none. The judgment of history is likely to be that Britain's opportunity in this decade was to work towards these practical objectives, in partnership with EFTA, the Commonwealth and if possible the United States,

with a standing invitation to the Common Market to join in at any time it might wish. But if we try to rush into the Market now at all costs, before its constitution and policies are reformed, we shall throw away all these opportunities for the world as well as grievously weakening ourselves for the foreseeable future.

It would be far wisest, therefore, for us as a nation today, while persistently working for these long-term aims, to reject any deal with the Common Market which involved us in either: (1) higher food prices or antiquated tax and other internal policies; (2) any break with our Commonwealth and EFTA friends; or (3) any supra-national or federal constitution, taking the control of British internal affairs out of the hands of the British electorate and Parliament.

Wider Vision

In the end, by firmly sticking to these wider principles, and rejecting the narrow Common Market obsession, the probability is that both EFTA, ourselves and the Commonwealth — and it may be the United States — would become members of a larger but looser association than the present Six, in which all, including the Common Market, would be free to conduct their own internal affairs in the way that their own people choose. This would be a far better way both for Britain and the world; and it happens to be what the vast majority of British people rightly desire.