

Debates on the Common Market at the British Labour Party conference (Brighton, 17 July 1971)

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Mr. Ray Appes (Brighton, Kempdown C.L.P.): Comrade Chairman and Comrades, the working people of this country have instinctively understood that as far as entry into the E.E.C. is concerned for them, they will have to bear the cost. They will have to bear the burden of the price of entry without any long-term possibility of a steady and lasting improvement in the standard of living of themselves and for their families.

The previous speaker, Comrade Chairman, asked, how can we control the international companies, seeming to suggest that by Britain becoming a member of the Community somehow, with our Socialist brothers in Europe, we could control those monopolies. Yes, the international monopolies have a greater control over our lives than the elected Governments of all countries, but if we are to control these monopolies and use the resources of Europe in the interests of the working people of Europe, it is necessary for us to own those monopolies. (*Applause.*)

[...]

But what is the alternative to the Common Market? What is the alternative that some of the anti-Marketeers are putting before us? They are not putting one, are they? Are they suggesting that we should carry on in the same old way? What does that mean? It means, does it not, 800,000 unemployed? It means falling living standards. It means people homeless. It means that our old people die every winter because they have not got the means to keep themselves warm.

I believe that this Conference has got an historic opportunity to give a lead to the oppressed and underprivileged throughout the world. We should say to our comrades who are here from Europe, "We do not oppose the Common Market on narrow nationalistic lines, but we do not think it will help you in your struggle to improve the living standards of the working people of Europe by reaching a pact with your exploiters in order to further extend their common exploitation."

[...]

Let us start such a move from this Conference today. Yes, we reject the E.E.C. But we stand for a united and political Europe — not a capitalist one, but a United Socialist States of Europe." (*Applause.*)

[...]

Mr. Ray Grantham (Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union): [...]

The offer of Association to all the underdeveloped Commonwealth countries from the E.E.C., the adoption of proposals for import quotas for industrial goods from the underdeveloped countries without tariff barriers represents a tremendous step forwards for all the undeveloped countries. It is claimed that we shall be unable to export to the Commonwealth if we go into the E.E.C. In 1964 our trade totalled £1,340 million. In 1970 it had increased by 25%. Poor Germany, saddled with the C.A.P., having no Commonwealth preference, no historical ties, and paying higher real wages than us, increased its trade in the same period with the Commonwealth by 140% to £1,130 million. Keep us out of E.E.C. for another ten years and not only will we be the poorest nation in Europe but will we be short on trade with the Commonwealth. In 15 years time the value of Commonwealth preferences to us will become derisory through inflation.

The anti-Marketeers want us to throw away permanent advantages for Europe for the wasting assets of Commonwealth preference. We have finished only half the negotiations with the E.E.C. When we have joined we shall do the other more profitable half. We have to hammer out an E.E.C. aircraft policy. We have to hammer out an E.E.C. technology policy. We need an E.E.C. regional policy, and an E.E.C. policy for replacing obsolescent industry. Every one of these policies will help Britain financially more than any other country and thus offset the cost of the C.A.P.

The whole history of the E.E.C. shows that the real negotiations take place within the Market, not outside.

The Europeans know that we, as relatively the poorest nation in Western Europe, will not tolerate permanently paying the highest net contribution to the budget, and negotiators when we are inside will be pressing for new policies of the kind to which I have referred, which will substantially reduce our net contribution to the Community.

When the Common Market was formed in 1960, 24% of the working population were farmers, the poor peasants. Today only 14% are farmers. In ten years time old age and the Mansholt Plan will have cut them down to 7%. We have 3% of our people on the land, and, taking account of their large area, that would be broadly comparable. It is interesting that, in the E.E.C., their 86% of the non-farming population who have to pay C.A.P. prices produce a higher standard of living than our 97% who do not pay C.A.P. prices. Can an anti-Marketeer explain the realities of that? (*Applause.*)

[...]

Mr. Richard Briginshaw (Society of Graphical and Allied Trades): [...]

When I listened to the first speaker in this debate it appeared not to be confined to the Tories and their endeavour for political reasons to drive us panic-stricken into the Common Market Community. I think that our people will overcome the present great brainwash of the Tory Government. Since 1961, when the then Tory Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, prepared the first desperate attempt to join E.E.C., our ruling class, our ruling Establishment, have consciously, in our view, spread a line of national defeatism — defeatism in the affairs of this nation and of our people. Maybe the old order is dying for them, but for us we can better solve, in our view, any problems we have by staying out of the E.E.C.

[...]

The so-called dynamics of the E.E.C. are for us a fallacy. For instance, we repeat what we said publicly. Will Citroen, Renault, Volkswagen, Mercedes, Fiat close down the day we enter? Of course they will not. But they will increase their sales here. We could go into the details of the figures if we had time, but we have had it almost *ad nauseam*. That is why some of us would have liked a decision today.

The very logic, Chairman and colleagues, of the structure and future of the E.E.C. can bring our steel and coal industries to eventual death — the very logic of the structure of the E.E.C.! This must mean that large areas of our country, both industrially and geographically, will become derelict. The people will have to move away from these areas. The fundamental reasoning of the Tories in joining is to perpetuate and dangerously widen the real division of the European nations. The present Prime Minister has made this clear in a number of statements, even a recent one.

For these reasons, in this short presentation, we are opposed to the United Kingdom entry into the E.E.C. under any conceivable terms. For us the path of entry into the Common Market is the path of national doom. We must demand a General Election now. The present Government, as one speaker has already said, and in our view as well, was elected on a false prospectus, and has consequently no mandate for anything, and certainly not a sell-out to the E.E.C.

We contend that we should reject this supposed solution to our national problems, the solution of a panic run into the E.E.C. We repeat we believe our problems can best be overcome by staying out. The application terms, negotiated by the Heath Government, should be rejected, and the application in our view should be withdrawn.

[...]

Mr. Clive Jenkins (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs): I would like to get back to the harsh realities of the situation. We are being invited to join a fraction of Europe, and I want to look beyond that fraction of Europe. I want to look at all the other great nation States, because when you look at the Six (if the glittering vision given to us of the stable, expanding countries was in any way true) I would be

a pronounced Marketeer. But look at the realities: France, strongly in the grip of a reactionary government, twice to the brink of civil war within a decade; Belgium, riven by problems of language and religion and in the hands of a tightly knit group of trusts; Italy, where there is a constant danger of a military coup. Now really, is this the picture we have been given by the Marketeers so far? (*Shouts from the floor.*) I want to deal also, if you wish, with Germany, because I believe that the grip that our comrades have in Germany is also very fragile indeed. If people are saying arrogantly that we can make a contribution which will revolutionise that situation, I for one do not believe it, because there is no grand political, social design here. What we have really got is a crude deal: industry has access to bigger markets in exchange for support of inefficient but politically powerful farmers.

And if you were to look at the figures, we export about 22 per cent of our exports to the E.E.C., we export about 16 per cent to E.F.T.A., 22 per cent to the Commonwealth, 9 per cent to the rest of the sterling area, 32 per cent to the rest of the world, and our exports in spite of the tariff barrier of the E.E.C. keep rising all the time. So on the arithmetic I think we can look after ourselves.

But what I am really concerned about is what happens to the great supra-national company. Every supra-national company wants us in, and I suggest to you that if they have that motivation it might not be good for the ordinary citizens of this country. (*Applause.*) Because what they can then do is have international subdivision of manufacture — engines here, cars there, aircraft there — and that means international subdivision of jobs as well, and of pay as well. They will be able to move across national frontiers as if they were invisible. This is an enormous contribution to the power of these distant groups of executives, and some of us wanted a decision today because between now and October immense sums of money are going to be spent on seducing and subverting us. Within one period of eighteen months recently it is estimated £20 million was spent on swaying opinion. I want to say something else which may be unwelcome and uncharitable. I would like our friends in the Labour Committee for Europe to publish their balance sheet. (*Applause.*) And I tell you what, I will do them a favour, we will get the anti-Marketeers to publish theirs as well, because one is heavily, lavishly subsidised.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I suggest what we should do is say this. A distant Brussels bureaucracy dominated by the great companies is less attractive to us than the capacity to manage, to manipulate, to influence and decide our own affairs. (*Applause.*)

[...]

Rt. Hon. Peter Shore, M.P. (ex-officio, Stepney): Chairman, I do not think there is much doubt for anyone who has studied the White Paper which this Government has recently published that the terms that have been negotiated and brought back from Luxembourg and Brussels are bad, indeed appallingly bad for the people of this country. And when one considers the nature of the deed, it is not perhaps altogether surprising that this should be so. For what we have been persuaded, or our negotiators have been persuaded to concede, is the abandonment of the 120-year-old policy of cheap food for this country, a switch of supply from traditional low cost suppliers to the high cost, inefficient farms of Western Europe; Britain to withdraw from the two preferential areas of which she is a member in trade, from EFTA and from the Commonwealth, to go into the third club, the Common Market, which takes only 20 per cent of her trade; and to liberate for the first time since 1939, the movement of capital, the movement of firms out of Britain into Western Europe.

It would indeed be a surprise if terms could be negotiated against that background of obligation which could be said to be satisfactory to the people of this country. But there is this time an additional and major new development which certainly was not there in 1967. I refer, of course, to the special way of financing the Common Agricultural Policy of the Six, which, at the insistence of France, the Six agreed amongst themselves only in the beginning of 1970, and as a clear, positive precondition for negotiation with this country. It is this contribution system which has imposed on Britain the additional burden across the balance of payments from the end of the so-called transitional period, of the sums that cannot be less than £400 million a year, and which could easily rise to nearly £700 million a year. Sums, in other words, that within less than a decade would cost this nation all — or the equivalent sum to all — the debts that we have accumulated during both the first and the second world war as expressed in the sterling balances.

Now, this is a vast burden which has been taken upon this country. George Thomson, George Brown, the Labour Government when it negotiated in 1967, did not negotiate against that background, it did not even exist. (*Applause.*) And the Six themselves, as I say, and above all France, insisted on keeping Britain out in 1963, and again in 1967, so that she could make strong and permanent those arrangements which are so much in her own interest, and which are so crippling to our own.

Of course, the new Government's White Paper does not even dare to spell out the implications of this deal for Britain. There is less information, far less, in the Government's White Paper after one year of negotiation than there was in the White Paper published by the Labour Government before the negotiations began 18 months ago. They have not dared to do it, or why are they missing the suppressed chapters which would spell out the cost of our balance of payments, and arising from that cost, the inevitable deflation, the inevitable loss to the regions already weak in this country, and the crippling loss that this would impose upon the rate of growth and output of this country? For people to say that going into Europe will increase the prosperity and rate of growth of this country is flagrantly dishonest. It is not right, and they know it is not right.

Now, what they may be saying is something quite different. They may be saying that over a period of years, perhaps 10 years' time, because that lies at the end of the period in which economists and others can look ahead, and having gone through a vale of tears, things may be better. That they may be saying. But it is wrong for them, and a gross deceit upon the British people to try to tell us that we shall increase our prosperity as a nation in the years that will follow entry. We are in for a great national disaster if we are to enter on these terms.

Therefore, I would end by saying, as I see I too am caught by the yellow light, and there is so much more to be said, I would say this. Do not be depressed by these feeble voices which convince you, or seek to convince you, first, that you have no capacity to solve your own problems; secondly, that the world of tomorrow is a world of vast aggregates, regional blocs from which it is death to be excluded, it is not; thirdly, do not fear, you have the power to stop this act of madness and to change the history of this country and to insist that we shall make arrangements for our future that are right — not for the C.B.I. and for Edward Heath, but for the people of Britain. (*Prolonged applause and cheers.*)

The Chairman: I want a pro-Marketeer now.

Mr. Richard Hoyle (Richmond, Yorkshire C.L.P.):

[...]

Comrades, I am sure many of you have read the Treaty of Rome word for word and hated almost every syllable of it. (Cries of "Hear, hear".) It is quite evident that the Treaty of Rome was designed and devised specifically to keep this country out. It is only natural, therefore, that we should have many reservations on the changes to be made in the Treaty, these so-called terms of entry. What really is required is a second Treaty of Rome, or better still, a new Treaty of Brussels. A new Treaty would be highly desirable as far as agriculture and horticulture are concerned, and in my constituency, which incidentally is the largest agricultural constituency in the country, we are naturally most concerned as to how farm workers and farmers will be affected both directly and indirectly. Would a great many hill farms become derelict? Would our low paid farm workers really get the opportunity of a square deal for the first time ever?

Our greatest worry though is that it is a Tory Government which is responsible for making the transitional arrangements. We would be far, far happier if a Labour Government were conducting the negotiations, for the simple reason that Labour Governments have always shown far greater concern for the farming fraternity than have the Tories, who might easily sell farming down the river — but not the landowners, by Jove!

We hear an awful lot of talk about what we can get out of Europe and what Europe can do for us. But surely,

our main consideration should be about the contribution we could make to Europe, towards the creation of a saner, kinder and more peaceful continent.

We British, with our remarkable genetic background, are, if we believe our history books, in the main a magnificent dolly mixture of European genes and chromosomes. Thus, with our exceptional hybrid vigour, we British can undoubtedly provide added stimulus to Europe by our extra brains and skills and by the extra capital and know-how that we would be able to inject into the European economy.

It is a most interesting fact that we have as much capital employed here in the United Kingdom as is employed in the whole of France, Germany and Italy together, and we all know that the British working man is second to none. I believe it was Nye Bevan who said, "A good Socialist cannot be an isolationist, nor even a nationalist; he must at all times be an internationalist." If we believe in the brotherhood of man then we must believe in the brotherhood of all men; and joining the European Community means expanding and extending the European brotherhood, and must surely be a firm and positive step towards the ultimate brotherhood of all men all over the world. *(Applause.)*