

# THE FINAL SHOWDOWN ON THE EEC

*Christopher Frere-Smith*



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**N**INETEEN-SEVENTY-ONE will be a fateful year for Britain. A year in which a decision will be taken one way or the other on the question of whether we should join the European Economic Community.

This decision will be taken here and not in Brussels. It is for us, the people of this country, to decide, whether we wish to join. Although it is perfectly true that we could join only if the EEC wish to have us, it is as well to remember that it does not follow, even if they decided to accept us, that we would decide to join. This may sound a very obvious point but alas it is not, because of the pro-marketeters who have deliberately confused the whole issue.

They have told us time out of number that it is impossible to pass judgement on whether we should join or not until we know what terms are available. This subterfuge has of course been deliberately pursued in order to try to conceal the fact that the question which should have been put and answered in the affirmative before the negotiations were started, has never been put—and that is "Do the British people want Britain to be part of the European Community?"

The reason this has never been asked is because those who are so anxious that we should join know that the answer would undoubtedly be in the negative which would mean that it would be impossible even to enter into negotiations, or, having entered into negotiations, to proceed with them.

One thing is now clear, the British public have no desire to join the Common Market. Rising costs, faster inflation, dear food and concern over jobs are a few of the apprehensions on which the public based their rejection of the whole idea. Whilst conceding these apprehensions as justifiable, the pro-marketeters retort that given fair terms (whatever that may mean, and no one as yet has

told us) the dynamic effect of joining a large home market would offset the increased costs and that the resulting higher wages which would follow would enable wage earners to meet the higher costs. In other words the best we could hope for would be that we would be all square!

If this is the best that can be hoped for economically, there must be some overwhelming and compelling reason for joining if the public are to be convinced. What is the compelling reason? There has never been an answer to this question and the best that the Eurofanatics can produce is an integrated Western Europe in which national frontiers are eliminated.

Little wonder that the pro-marketeters decided that they could not afford to ask the people the initial question of whether they wished to join the Common Market or not. It is ironical that the Eurofanatics who decided that this was too complex an issue for discussion and decision by the ordinary public should now be complaining that the anti-marketeters are having all the running.

Did Mr. Heath mean it when he said in Paris on May 5 that Britain could only join the Common Market if the application commanded the full hearted support of the British public? If he did it would be reasonable to suppose that the Government would now be back peddling on the whole question of entry. The evidence, however, is to the contrary. The only advances that have been made in the Brussels negotiations have been retreats by Mr. Rippon. Not one concession has been obtained of any importance, although it is fair to say that several stumbling blocks have not yet been reached. The whole of the Treaty was accepted as a condition precedent to the commencement of the negotiations and the Government has indicated that they are prepared to go along with any proposals for a full monetary and economic union in the community without even raising the question in the

negotiations! If Mr. Rippon continues to conduct the negotiations in the manner in which he has done to date, it is certainly conceivable that the Council of Ministers will be prepared to accept us.

Theoretically it would then be possible for the Government by cajoling and coercing their followers, and relying on the support of the hardcore pro-common market opposition members, to force a decision to join through Parliament. Mr. Heath, however, will not have overlooked the strength of opposition in the Tory party and the narrowness of his majority which is certainly smaller than the hardcore of Tory anti-marketeters who would vote against entry. Nor will Mr. Heath have overlooked the manifold opportunities for a government defeat during the lengthy period that would be required to force through the necessary enabling legislation to bring into line our laws and the powers of our law-making institutions (e.g., the Courts themselves would have to have

their wings clipped because they would be subjected on matters covered by the Treaty of Rome to the over-riding powers of the European Court).

Mr. Heath will know his history and what happened in 1846 in the country and in the Tory party itself at the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws.

The Government should be reminded that even if it were able to force us into the EEC against the wishes of the people it would be open to a future parliament to take us out. Indeed so great would be the pressure to do this from the public, who had begun to feel the impact of the cost of entry after joining, that future government might well find itself driven irresistably to that course. One can only hope that Mr. Heath, with his purpose of uniting the nation, will realise that to disregard the strength of public opinion on this issue would be to divide the nation and destroy what remaining respect the people have for parliamentary democracy.

## EEC Referendum?

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A SHORT while ago we touched on a topic which brought a quick, unfavourable reaction from several outspoken British officials. We had mentioned with some approbation the campaign being conducted by Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Minister of Technology in the last Labour Government, for a popular referendum on the desirability of Britain's joining the Common Market, once the terms of entry were known.

We were told that referenda are not part of the British system, that in Britain the elected members of Parliament speak for the people, that the fact of a popular referendum on the horizon would hamper the talks, and so on. These are all valid arguments. They may indeed turn out to be decisive points. After all, neither the Conservative Government nor the Labour opposition has taken up the Wedgwood Benn proposal.

Yet, we cannot help asking whether on an issue of such magnitude a referendum does not make a great deal of sense. It is not every century that a nation with Britain's proud and aloof history is asked to submerge its economic existence—and perhaps ultimately its political existence as well—in a seven-nation international entity.

Under such circumstances, should not every Alf and Kate have the opportunity to vote directly on what so mightily affects them? For, while it is true that Britain has few peers in the matter of effective representative democracy, it is also true that, on the issue of joining the Common Market, members of Parliament would not be voting so much on how their constituents felt as on how the party whips ordered them to vote.

As for the desirability of referenda, many lands have them. Australia, so close to Britain, in many ways, uses them. Italy held a national referendum to decide on whether to remain a monarchy. They are one of the

commonest and most effective instruments of direct democracy in the various states of the United States. France has held several important national referenda in recent years. There are national issues in the United States which might well be helpfully resolved through such nationwide means.

One of the greatest advantages of a referendum is that the debate on the issue is directed straight at the average voter and is not confined to the halls of Parliament or Congress.

We hope that Britain will not reject the suggestion without open-minded study.

## A Pilot Referendum on the Common Market

The majority of the people in Britain are of the opinion that there should be either a referendum or a general election before the Government makes a final decision as to whether or not to join the Common Market.

The *Daily Telegraph* recently carried out a Gallup Poll which showed that only one in five think Parliament alone should make the decision.

If a referendum were held on the Common Market at present the indications are that there would be an overwhelming vote against joining.

On being asked whether or not they approved of the Government applying for membership, 66 per cent disapproved, a meagre 16 per cent approved while 13 per cent didn't know.

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