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The Common Market!

The market you have to have when you don't really want a market?

*In 2003 & 2006 I spent a total of 7 months in the UK a fair proportion of that time was spent walking and camping wherever and every night I would visit the nearest pub for a Guinness or three, talked to a lot of people about many things but often about the Common Market because I think Denmark had just had a referendum and knocked the EU back, Ireland later did the same in it's first referendum and during all my talks in the pubs and elsewhere I never spoke to an Englishman (person) who was in favour of the UK joining the EU. And yet a UK referendum as far as I know has never been proposed by any of the recent UK governments.
Which puzzles me.*

*William Rees Mogg the well known commentator and writer, I think is also puzzled
From The Times - October 5, 2009*

Is it all over between Britain and Europe?

The forced Yes vote in Ireland makes it respectable to ask whether the benefits outweigh the sacrifices of staying in the EU

William Rees-Mogg

The Irish volte-face on the Lisbon treaty is a significant though melancholy event. It is sad because it represents another national surrender to Brussels. If the European Union fails to get the result it wants, it asks a second time and applies some extra pressure. The Irish were sandbagged by the fear that they would become a second Iceland, a financial disaster area.

Britain has not even had a first referendum, as a result of an elaborate European conspiracy. This conspiracy has changed the political question about Europe more than most politicians have yet realised. It has made the "better off out" policy a respectable part of political debate.

It has been a pan-European conspiracy involving the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, Lord Mandelson, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy. These people share responsibility for the drafting, re-drafting and re-naming of the treaty. They worked together to prevent Britain having the promised referendum, knowing that the British would vote "No".

There is a fundamental difference in the constitutional history of the United Kingdom and the history of the great continental powers. France has a Bonapartist tradition and Germany has a Bismarckian one. The Anglo-Saxon tradition is that of liberal democracy, hammered out in the United Kingdom after 1688 and the United States after 1776. The German philosopher is Hegel; the English is Locke.

The British understand the American constitution, but we do not understand well the European constitutions. Nor do the Europeans understand the Anglo-Saxon concepts of liberal democracy. The European Union does not pretend to have a liberal constitution; perhaps the Lisbon treaty can best be described as an authoritarian federal bureaucracy, seeking almost unlimited powers.

Ten years ago, when the Blair administration was already in power, it might have been possible to have a genuine negotiation to draft a constitutional treaty for Europe that would seek to reconcile the two traditions. Perhaps that opportunity still existed for the constitutional convention in which ex-President Giscard

d'Estaing of France took the chair. What emerged was a federalist constitution on the Franco-German model. It was always inevitable that such a constitution would be rejected by British voters.

Under Lisbon there is to be a new European president, who is widely expected to be Tony Blair, the man who promised the United Kingdom a referendum and agreed the treaty as his last significant act in office. If any one person should be blamed for the phoney promise of a referendum in Labour's 2005 election manifesto, it must be Tony Blair; he was, after all, Prime Minister at the time, and remained in office for a couple of years thereafter.

I doubt whether Chancellor Merkel reads the English newspapers, any more than Gordon Brown is a regular reader of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. If she did, she would have known how greatly resented Mr Blair now is in Britain. No single decision could do more to damage the European Union in Britain than his appointment as an unelected president of Europe.

No doubt Mr Blair still has his fans, though I have not happened to meet one in the past year or so. He is now seen by many British voters as having lied over the European referendum, while another substantial group think he lied over Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction. My own moderate view, to borrow the old judicial phrase, is that Mr Blair cannot be regarded as a witness whose word can safely be relied on.

If Chancellor Merkel has a full report of British opinion, she will realise that a Blair presidency of Europe would be regarded as Mr Blair's reward for having helped to secure British ratification of the Lisbon treaty without a referendum. He has gone on to become conspicuously rich by making overseas speeches to clubs of millionaires who like to hear celebrities talk. Whatever happens to anyone else, Mr Blair always seems to be in the lifeboat when the ship goes down.

If the British saw the Lisbon treaty as a genuine agreement among independent nations, which had been ratified either by a referendum or a general election, they might accept it. But it is not, and they do not. They are now asking themselves whether the benefits of belonging to a complex bureaucratic regional block of ageing powers and declining economies outweigh the sacrifice of British sovereignty. Whether it is in Britain's interest to remain in the European Union has become a matter of legitimate debate.

There are, of course, arguments on both sides. Europe will want continued access to the British market, just as Britain wants continued access to the European market. However, there are other markets, particularly in Asia, which are growing much faster. No one suggests that Australia should surrender Australian sovereignty in order to trade with China.

There are two questions to be settled. The first is, "Does Europe want Britain?" There are plenty of people in Europe who believe in British influence but there are others who think that the United Kingdom is an Anglo-Saxon cultural intruder into the real European community, and that we will never change.

The second question is, "Does Britain want Europe?" Are there sufficient commercial and strategic gains to compensate for the loss of sovereignty and the right to make our own laws?

More importantly, we have to ask whether we are partners in a failed marriage. We have the impression we are giving more than we get; Germany and France have the opposite impression. Perhaps our relations with Europe would actually improve if we stopped pretending to be Europeans.