

IRELAND AND THE EEC



by
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Introduction

The European Communities are about politics. They are more than coal and steel, machinery and butter, energy and transport. The European Communities are stepping stones on the way to political unification in Europe.

Any other evaluation of their purpose is only partial at best, at worst it is naïve. To be involved in the three communities is to be committed to a conscious sacrifice of national political sovereignty for the purpose of creating a supra-national political system in Europe.

There has never been any doubt about this fact in Europe. But there has been little debate about it in this country. A narrow concentration on the economic issue involved – somewhat reminiscent of Mr Heath's unfortunate preoccupation with Pakistani cricket bats and Australian kangaroo meat in the 1961/63 British negotiations – has dominated public discussion in our country as to the question of should or shouldn't we?

Admittedly, the economic situation of our country is such that at all times it dominates the minds of those who are concerned for the national wellbeing and so the neglect of the political issues involved is perhaps excusable. But it would be unpardonable if we were to allow that neglect to continue.

The Communities are Political

The move into Europe is a political move, not an economic one like the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement. As such, the only parallels that can be found in the past forty-five years are the enactment of the 1938 Constitution and the 1948 Republic of Ireland Act which established us, in this part of Ireland, as an independent state free of any association with an international community of nations.

The opinion of the European Commission on our application for membership, together with that of Britain, Norway and Denmark published at the end of last September, made this point quite clear. Addressing itself to the Council of Ministers under the appropriate articles of the Rome and Paris Treaties, the Commission stated that "Today, belonging to the Communities necessarily means accepting not only their original charters – the Treaties – but also the objectives of political unification".

It added that the applications faced the Community with “a choice of major importance on which the future of the economic and – in the long term – the political relations between European states depends; the success of such an undertaking would constitute a decisive step forward towards completion of the work for European unification that has been going on since the end of the Second World War”.

The short and immediate term problems of adjusting our agriculture and industry to the requirements of common agricultural and industrial markets must not be allowed to dominate the public consciousness of what Europe is all about.

In the long run, and like most of my generation, I hope to live to enjoy the long run, going into Europe means being involved in the building of what Winston Churchill called “a kind of United States of Europe”.

Nobody as yet has any clear idea of what form political unification will take, least of all those most intimately involved in the European process at this moment. But there can be no disputing that the next twenty-five years will be one of hammering out the details of what eventually will be a supra-national political structure in Europe.

While General de Gaulle may claim to infallibility he cannot hope for immortality and it is inevitable that the impetus for European integration will once again come from the inspiration of Frenchmen like Jean Monnet and the initiative of men like Robert Schumann.

There exists at the moment what Nietzsche once called “a paralysis of will” but it is only a pause.

The political will to create something concrete out of concepts and ideals will reassert itself in the seventies. Going into Europe means the voluntary acceptance of a commitment to a political programme of action for which customs union and economic union are but the necessary foundations.

Peaceful Democratic Revolution

We are, therefore, faced with a proposition which, on the surface, is only concerned with the establishment of a customs and economic union, but which in reality is a movement towards political unity. The Preamble to the first European Community, that of the Coal and Steel Community set up in 1951, proposed that “by creating an economic community... to lay the bases of institutions capable of giving direction to (the European Nations’) future common destiny”.

There you touch the fundamental principle of the creation of Europe – the free delegation of sovereign power, by nations which so far have functioned only on the basis of their own national sovereignty, now delegating part of that sovereignty to common institutions, which may in turn exercise it.

Jean Monnet, the first president of the European Coal and Steel Community ECSC High Authority explained four years before the establishment of the EEC that “the form of the peaceful democratic revolution which Europe is undergoing will end by the erection of the United States of Europe”. He called the new community institutions the first federal institutions of Europe.

The strategy of achieving political unification through economic unification was conceived over twenty years ago. The idea of expanding the scope of the Communities to include political objectives is not something that has grown up as a result of creating the economic communities. The economic communities were established to assist in the creation of a political community.

The purpose of men like Monnet couldn’t be clearer. Economic union is dependent upon the aim of political union and cannot be understood if it is divorced from this objective. The Bonn declaration of the Heads of State in 1961 said that they had decided “to give shape to the will for political union already implicit in the Treaties”. De Gaulle, however, decided to retard

this momentum because he had a different concept of a political Europe. His disagreement is political – about the structure of a United Europe – whether it should be a supra-national system or a “Europe des Patries”.

I come back to the point on which I opened. The European Communities are but a preamble to political unity. Debate about the advisability of Irish entry into Europe must distinguish between the short-term problems of adjusting our economy to a common market and the long-term problem of subordinating our national sovereignty in a political union of European states.

The question of entry into Europe cannot be answered solely in terms of an accountant’s balance sheet or an economist’s evaluation of our economic dependence on Britain. It can only be completely answered in terms of whether or not we accept a real rather than a naïve commitment to political unity. However, let me add on a personal note, that no matter how committed I might be to the European ideal, I do not wish to see the Irish economy sacrificed on the altar of European unity.

Is it worth it?

The question to be answered is “is it worth it?” Is the European ideal worthy of the sacrifice of our political sovereignty, which we fought for so long?

It is easy to slip into cold war terminology when expounding on Europe’s future role and to express the basic purpose of European unity as a means of collective defence against a red or yellow peril. There is no doubt that this fear gave considerable momentum to the idea of unification in the late forties and early fifties but it is a negative reason contingent upon the presence of an aggressor at the gates and one which declines in importance as that fear diminishes. It would never of its own sustain a concerted effort to remove the many obstacles to unity.

The removal of the causes of nationalist wars between Europeans and the securing of a peace in our time figured prominently in the minds of many as a prime reason for seeking closer ties, indissoluble ties, between states which had twice in three decades all but annihilated each other.

But as the passage of time erodes even the most bitter memories of bloodshed and destruction this could hardly be offered as a sure foundation for a political system which will demand, on occasion, putting the common European interest before that of one’s own nation. There must be some stronger motivation to overcome nationalism and militarism.

The unity ideal must be bedded in the belief that Europe has a distinctive and unique role to play in the world of the next half century if it is to generate sufficient motive power to give it the stamina and determination to overcome any obstacle. That role must be one of establishing an equilibrium on the one hand, between the two great giants which a century ago De Tocqueville feared would hold the world in their hands and, on the other, an equilibrium between the rich and the poor continental communities.

If Europe has a positive contribution to make then it can only come through unified action. States which, like Britain, France and Germany, were world powers only a quarter of a century ago are now impotent in world crises. It is only by uniting and by expressing a common political will that they can have any impact on the world scene.

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If Europe is the cradle of a powerful civilisation which despite her colonialist past,

the horrors of Nazism and the inhumanities of the capitalist system has been powerful enough to survive and if she still believes in the ideals of liberty, equality, justice and dignity of man, then what she has to contribute to the world is valuable and priceless. If this is but fanciful delusion, then the only argument for European unity is naked self-interest.

The world order stands on two powder kegs at present – the armed confrontation of two imperial camps with global commitments and the economic exploitation of the poor nations by the rich.

There is as yet no one to interpose themselves at Panmunjom to prevent more incidents like that of the seizure of the “USS Pueblo”, or to bring peace to Vietnam and prevent more Khe Sanhs. There is no power as yet that can halt the lunacy that leads to hydrogen bombs crashing into the Mediterranean off the Spanish coast or the wastes of Greenland. There is as yet no expression of sanity that would force the de-escalation of American or Soviet, not to mention Chinese, military involvements across the globe.

I do not regard this consideration as fantasy. It is such a horrifying reality that most of us maintain our balance of reason by ignoring it and concentrating instead on the next Eurovision Song Contest or a football match. Posterity, if there be a posterity, will regard us with the same unbelieving fascination as we regard the armed continents of Orwell’s “1984”.

In New Delhi next week, under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development one hundred and thirty nations will confront each other in an economic war as real and as terrible as the military confrontation of Russia, America and China.

The participant countries will have per capita national incomes ranging from \$ 3,600 for the Americans to \$ 70 for the Indonesians. Our Minister for Labour, Dr. Hillary, will represent us as one of the nations which account for three quarters of the world’s income. but only

one fifth of the world’s population. Half of the world’s population earns only 7% of world income. The injustice, the inhumanity of the neo-colonialist exploitation of the poor nations can only be ended by the exercise of unequalled wisdom and compassion, and I might add, an unequalled realisation of where our best long term interests lie.

The reader will be familiar with this situation and with the responsibility devolving upon the developed countries from Pope Paul’s Encyclical “Progresio Populorum”, which the Institute has used as the basis of classes, lectures and seminars.

These are the two great world problems of our epoch. It is possible, as Walter Hallstein said in 1962, speaking as the President of the EEC Commission, that history will regard the imbalance in world wealth as the central problem of our age. Many believe that it is only through a United Europe that European nations can make an effective contribution to a world solution. And a solution must be found.

Europe’s Own Problems

Europe, however, has her own problems. There is an east and there is a west. There is the perennial problem of Germany.

The break up of the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe opens up the possibility of easing the relationships between the two groups of nations. The growing independence of the Communist European nations in their international policy and their freedom in experimenting with forms of economic organisation and management present us with a situation very different to that of ten years ago.

Contacts between the six EEC countries and the eastern states are growing. Yugoslavia and Poland have made overtures to the European Communities in the field of trade relationships. There now exists the long run possibility of easing east/west tension in Europe by

establishing closer ties between the states and by normalising their relations.

If we lived on the European mainland we would appreciate more fully the political importance of this possibility because this is the one way of finding a solution to the German problem. The continued division of Germany, the non-recognition of the Eastern half, the rise of neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) party, these are the real danger points within the continent itself.

The answer to the German problem can only be found within the framework of a European solution. The NPD will grow strong so long as the division of Germany appears to be permanent and so long as the rupture of Europe is unhealed. Furthermore, the NPD is a threat if democratic institutions in Europe are weak. The strengthening of democracy in West Germany through its association with new European political institutions can effectively halt the reoccurrence of the situation in the Weimar Republic.

But Europe is not only divided politically between East and West. It is divided economically between North and South, regrettably that division is accentuated by the presence of four non-democratic regimes in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey. The ineffectiveness of an economic community in dealing with a political problem was brought home during the Greek military takeover in April of last year. The six EEC countries were unable to influence events in its associate member, although they did suspend their aid programme in protest.

This economic division, with its consequent political divisions, is a major problem for which there is no realisable policy outside that of concerted action by European institutions.

Lastly, the point must be made that many Europeans are in favour of integration because, acting out of self-interest, they can see no chance of Europe's world role and her own economic status being maintained in a fragmented

economy. Economic integration makes political sense because if Europe is to be politically strong it must be economically strong. If its people are to enjoy a high standard of living, which is a valid political objective, the European economy must accommodate itself with the facts of the age.

Modern technology demands continental markets. The vast investment that must be put into research and development can only be justified if the scale of production is big enough to benefit from modern industrial techniques.

There is reason to believe that this century will see the emergence of two new economic giants to challenge America, Russia and Europe. They are Japan and China. The Japanese have achieved growth rates which are almost unbelievable and by the end of the century will be second only to the United States in income per head. Most probably, there will be a convergence of the countries in Asia. The great potential of Asia, particularly countries like Indonesia, will be realised and will rival the Western industrial economies that have developed over the last two centuries. This is a compelling reason for integration.

What of the next Twenty Years

To my mind these are the major threads in the argument for European integration. Despite the lack of detail, which it is impossible to achieve in a short paper, the logic of the argument can be recognised and it is a formidable case.

What then of the next twenty years? Within the Six EEC states, the running-in stage of the Customs Union is almost over, eighteen months ahead of schedule. The next task is economic integration, that is, the creation of one economy instead of six. This obviously means that far reaching political decisions will have to be made, leading to a re-organisation of political sovereignty which was the point I stressed at the opening.

The optimal use of resources will demand planning at a European level. National monetary and fiscal policies will be framed in the light of supra-national policies. There will be the task of creating one monetary system, a European currency with common reserves and a common exchange rate.

A major attack will be made against the obstacles preventing the harmonisation of social policies so as to create one social system. The individual systems of law will be modified to meet European requirements especially in matters relating to commercial practice, for example making it possible to establish European companies.

In fiscal policy the harmonisation of the taxation system will be the major task, not so much in the area of indirect taxation where a start has been made with the agreement on French TVA, but in direct taxation both personal and corporate.

It is the easiest thing in the world to recognise that economic integration will involve governments in political decisions – for what can be more political than the level of income tax, the farmers' return on a gallon of milk or the rate of old age pension?

There will be the political tasks to which I have referred – predominantly the expansion of the Community, the normalisation of relations with Eastern Europe and aid to underdeveloped countries.

But one great task will face the Europeans – that of building a supra-national political structure which will democratically control the executive action of the Commission. The strengthening of the European Parliament will be the decisive step on the road to creating a political community.

At present its powers are effectively nil, its role consultative and educational. In 1960 it adopted proposals for the phased introduction of universal suffrage and the establishment of a common electoral law, using proportional

representation which is in operation in each of the six member states. Those proposals were put on ice and are a continuing challenge to democrats.

The range of activity of the European Parliament is restricted to the objectives of the Treaty of Rome and it does not have the universal competence of fully developed Parliaments. The next twenty years will see its competence extended until it becomes an effective democratic instrument acting in a European context.

The conviction that this will happen is based on the experience of the Parliament in action and the political will of five of the member states, in particular the Benelux countries who have so recently taken the initiative for establishing closer relations with the applicant nations.

The experience of the Parliament is that the national delegations have not been institutionalised. Delegates sit in supra-national blocs as Socialists, Christian Democrats or Liberals. The Gaullists sit as Gaullists, which is ideologically sound. If the Government's application for membership is successful I reckon we will have approximately ten seats on the basis of the current allocation. The existence of different political groupings will obviously cause both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael some soul searching as to their positioning in the chamber. The Labour Party would obviously take its place amongst its fellow members of the Socialist International.

There would be an advantage in this because as a recent study of the European Parliament by Gerda Zellerman showed, "the socialists are not only the largest minority but as a parliamentary group they constantly show the strongest cohesion. The socialists are actually the only force whose long range dominant goal is the establishment of an economic and political community".

"Their chief goal is to keep under control the social and economic inequalities which could result from opportunistic compromises

between Commission and Council and from the weak bargaining position of non-producers". This is because, while not being angels, they are at least democrats.

Conclusion

Going into Europe is a political matter. It is vital and essential that we have the implications of our entry measured against the commitment demanded of us. The purpose of the European Communities is clear – a United States of Europe. The role of a United Europe is challenging, although it could degenerate into mere self-interest.

No decision in the past forty-five years will affect us as profoundly as this one. It will radically affect every facet of our industrial, agricultural social and cultural life. It will completely change the character of our political institutions. For those reasons the public discussion on the Common Market must be expanded beyond legitimate concern with economic consequences and transformed into debate about Europe and its political goals.

We are being asked to replace an old political system for one completely new and untried. We are being asked to replace one political generation by another with its hopes and ambitions based upon a continent.

I hope that when the time comes, we can respond with imagination, generosity and limitless faith in the future.

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