

# AN HISTORIC STATEMENT ON THE EEG

Extract from a speech by Enoch Powell, M.P., January, 1972

THE QUESTION of Britain and the European Economic Community has come home at last to where it belongs, to the people of Britain. Far from being decided and settled, only now is it posed to the people's house, the House of Commons. Let there be no moaning or groaning or prevarication - the people of this country are the masters of the House of Commons, it is their's in two senses: it is their's because whatever is taken away from the House of Commons is taken away from the people of Britain; and it is their's because, if it does not speak their mind, when that mind is determined and strong, then it speaks for nobody and, in the last resort, is nothing.

The people of Britain know, and they have been told by the Queen's chief minister himself, that their country cannot be taken into the Community without "their full-hearted consent." It is true; and it is not a quibble about percentages and opinion polls and Whip's offices. Everyone knows what the full-hearted consent of the people of Britain means. Once or twice in a lifetime that full-hearted consent is necessary, and is accorded, to the most momentous acts of state. We all remember such; and this is as momentous as those were. If this act is done without that consent, (which means against the will of any substantial proportion, let alone a majority of the British people) then not only will the government of this country be forsworn. The nation will have betrayed itself. There will be no appeal, no excuse, no apology: scapegoats may be sought, and will be found, but the verdict on the people will be *felo de se*. Everybody

in the coming months carries a personal responsibility, which he cannot transfer or delegate to others.

No such legislation has ever been laid before the House of Commons as that which is proposed to it for the ratification of the Treaty of Brussels, a treaty which, until that ratification takes place (if it ever does), is provisional and of no effect, so that in the real full sense the question is an open question. There are at least two respects in which that legislation is without precedent. First, the House of Commons will be told that, of all the multitude of changes in our law which the legislation makes or which it enables to be made, not a jot or tittle can be altered or deleted or amended: the House of Commons in effect will be told that it may debate if it pleases, but decide it cannot - short of the great decision itself - one way or the other. That is language which has not been used to the House of Commons these many hundred years.

Let us suppose that the House of Commons might wish to do what it is free to do with any other Bills submitted to it and often does - to alter what stands in the Bill. There is one argument, and one argument only, which the Government not only can but must use. Of the merits and the reasons they need say nothing; indeed they waste time if they do so. Their sole but sufficient reply is: "This is necessary in order to ratify and fulfill the treaty which we have signed; otherwise we would not have bothered to put it in the Bill."

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Imagine, however, that, greatly presuming, the House of Commons were to say to the Government: "Yes; but suppose we do reject or amend this provision, what then? Will you go back to Brussels and start negotiating again? Or will you give the whole thing up? For, on your own showing, you would not be able to fulfil the treaty. Or what else would happen?" The Government's reply would be as follows. They might not give it at the first, or second time of asking; but in the end it would be given. "No, of course we should not, and we could not, reopen negotiations. Nevertheless we shall go ahead and ratify. Naturally we have discussed all this with our friends on the Commission at Brussels, and we have decided what to do. When the treaty is in force, the Commission will trot along to the Court of Justice, and lay a complaint that in that or any other matter over which you might be tempted to be recalcitrant, the U.K. is not fulfilling its obligations; then of course they will get an order from the Court and you will be obliged to put back anything which you have altered or left out."

When this lesson has been taught, not once but over and over again, the House of Commons, and through the House of Commons the British people, will have begun to understand what it means to be a subordinate legislature. The House of Commons will have been told for the first time in its history: "You must do this; you cannot do that." The public will begin, too, to understand their own part of the bargain. Whatever law is made by or under this legislation, it will be no use constituents writing to their M.P.s or lobbying them and saying: "Change this law, we do not like it", or "make us another law instead of this one." Wearily the M.P.s. will reply: "We are sorry, dear friends; the House of Commons did not make this law because it wanted to, but because it had to; and we are not allowed to change it now if we wished."

Thus will the House of Commons be required publicly to divest itself of its own supreme and exclusive right to make law for the people of this kingdom, and to acknowledge the over-riding competence of an external authority in spheres of law-making which, according to the declared intention, are to be progressively extended. The House may think itself lucky to escape being made to wear a *sanbenito* and walk barefoot with a candle in its hand.

It will not be the House of Commons which will decide how and whether to tax the people by placing duties and levies on this country's imports and exports: that power is gone from the start. Nor will it be the House of Commons which will decide in what form indirect taxation is to be imposed upon the goods and services of use and of consumption: no longer will the budget be the House of Commons' ex-

clusive right and business. Some of the contents of Mr. Gladstone's despatch box will have been put there (to quote again) "by instruments issued by the Community's institutions", and the remainder of the contents must accommodate themselves to those.

The loss of legislative competence is not the only derogation which the House of Commons will be asked to accept. It will also be stripped of a considerable and ever increasing part of its practical right to criticize and call to account the executive. Membership of the Community brings with it an immense exaltation of the power of the executive in the member states, and a corresponding diminution in the power of Parliament. "But we", say the apologists of membership, "we shall be able to influence the common decisions; we shall have a voice along with the rest in the Council of Ministers; we shall, if the worst comes to the worst, be able, wherever the rule of unanimity applies, to impose our veto." Who is this "we"? It is not Parliament; it is not the House of Commons; it is the executive, and it is the executive acting not as heretofore in a sphere where it is fully responsible to Parliament and through Parliament to the people - it is the executive acting outside the sphere of Parliamentary challenge.

When this executive "we" return from Brussels to Westminster and proceed to put the new decrees into effect, they demand of Parliament the necessary compliance even more imperiously than the passage of this initial legislation is demanded: Parliament is told, "You cannot do otherwise; or you break the rules and decisions by which this country is now bound." If Parliament should presume to complain, to criticize the executive, to ask "Why did you agree to this? Why did you not veto it?", Parliament is promptly and conclusively told; "But we are few among many, and the majority went the other way; we could not use our veto because the consequences would have been even more disagreeable."

There is moreover a parting shot, which brooks no argument. The executive says to the House of Commons: "Censure us, if you please; defeat us, if you can; force a general election, and turn us out. It will all be to no effect. You cannot alter what is done, because it is not we alone who did it."

It is for or against this revolution that the people of Britain are able to decide and are called upon to decide. The people of this country have to say whether or not they are content no longer to be governed, taxed and legislated for by their House of Commons and those who are responsible to it; in short, whether they will keep or lose their own self-government.

I do not presume to know if they will exert their power to decide. It is not for me to fathom whether they care at all or how deeply they care. As for myself, my own part is taken, it has been declared



and shall be maintained; but that in itself is nothing.

Only of one thing I am certain, and that one thing, if I could, I would cry into the ear of every man and woman in the land. It is this: "The power is yours." No party, no majority, no House of Commons can, or dare, ignore or resist what those whom they represent say to them. There is a will, and an anger, which, if it is exerted, they dare not defy. Stronger governments and larger majorities have trembled and turned back when, on matters far less than the sovereignty of the people itself, the warning voice of those who made them has been raised; for governments, majorities and members are all, at the day's end, the potter's clay, they cannot forget their makers. Let people therefore not say, "We can do nothing." They can, if they will, do everything.

I conclude. If that which ought to be unthinkable, as it has been declared impossible, without the full-hearted consent of the people, is nevertheless done in the manifest absence of that consent; if the House of Commons, in the name of the British people, gives up

the authority and independence which it has exercised on their behalf so long, and the people of this country henceforward are to be taxed, governed, judged and ruled from elsewhere; let there be no doubt by whose fault it happened. Do not blame the whips; do not blame the Members; do not blame the patronage machine; do not blame the pressures, the threats, the promises, the bribes that will be brought to bear. It is the nation itself that will have judged itself. When it could have spoken, it will have stayed dumb; when it could have acted, it will have remained idle. Its words and its actions could take an infinitude of forms; but in substance they would be the same. "If", they would say to every Member of the House of Commons, "you agree to use the authority you hold from us in trust, for a purpose for which we never gave it and to which our consent has neither been sought nor given, depriving us thereby for the future of what is ours, not yours, then never dare to show your face before us again to seek our suffrage for yourself or your government or your party."

The power is still the people's if they have the will to use it.