

6.6.78

INSERT : Britain and the EEC - The Flood Street Declaration

by A.S.
following dinner
K.J. A.S. Enoch Powell
The "Flood" at meeting
never took
place.

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Box 3

I have discussed our vision of the role of the EEC in strengthening our economies, re-thinking its agricultural policies, helping the less industrialised periphery of Western Europe to draw closer. Much of this can be expressed on quantitative and administrative terms. The national dimensions of the community are of necessity less amenable to precise measurement. But this is all the more reason for us to try to formulate our position as clearly as we can.

The projected admission of Spain, Portugal and Greece - and the mooted of Turkish membership - are of necessity a step away from the cosy family-type entity originally envisaged. True, all three countries have recently restored democratic institutions which will, they hope, create their own traditions. All three are struggling to raise their economies to levels which will support modern social service administrations of the kind we know. We are pledged to support them in every way possible in a task which will be arduous and long.

We hope that while we are engaged in this task, democratic institutions in member countries will successfully ward off the threats to which they are at present subject. But in the meantime these developments can only reinforce what I see as our middle-of-the-road Europeanism. On the one hand, we do not begrudge minor concessions of sovereignty to the Community, any more than we do to NATO, which remains our primary commitment or to the International Maritime Commission. To suggest that parliamentary sovereignty has been abrogated because we accept those of Brussels regulations which we do not reject is to mistake form for content. Such objections are on a par with the late Hugh Gaitskell's plaint that signing the treaty would end a "thousand years of history". On the contrary, just as I believe that our entry into Europe adds more to our history than it subtracts. Similarly, I believe that middle-of-the-road membership enhances our economic strength and hence our independence and sovereignty.

People have asked whether we are irrevocably bound to accept Brussels' rulings. You might as well ask the same of any association. Sovereignty remains with the people in parliament. By a substantial majority the people of this country voted in a referendum in favour of remaining in the EEC, and parliament embodied the national will in legislation. No parliament can bind its successors - though of course obligations cannot lightly or unreasonably be set aside.. So if at any future date, which I devoutly hope will not come about, a majority of the electorate were to wish otherwise, parliament would doubtless embody their wishes.

This goes without saying. But we shall do everything, possible to make the community a success, and help it evolve into a balanced partnership. rather than cast gloom by envisaging the worst. In a happy marriage, people do not raise hypothetical questions about divorce.

I have spoken about the sovereignty which inheres in the traditional nation-states because these remain the foci of loyalty. I do not envisage anything like the emergence of a new European nationhood in the foreseeable future, on the analogy of the Americanism of the USA. There are no signs of this.

Neither in the UK nor in the rest of the Nine, has the treaty superseded nationhood, however defined. Just as Frenchmen remain French, Flemings Flemish, and Italians Italian, so we in Great Britain remain what we were before 1972. The Irish are no less Irish for now being joined with us in common membership, though there is room to hope that this will at the margin facilitate close relationships to help us solve the terrible Ulster problem, which affects both our countries equally.

All logic and history are against the likelihood of the emergence of a single European or Communal nation. The historic nations, formed during centuries, remain. Indeed what can be seen happening is the reverse of the blurring of national distinction, namely, the growth of micronationalism. The Catalans and Basques, each straddling the frontier between France and Spain, are asserting their separate identity while, for the most part, accepting the present state framework as do Bretons and Alsations. In Belgium, the Flemish revival, in Italy, strong regionalism, in Great Britain, the debate over the political implications of Scots and Welsh nationhood goes on while in Ulster the Irish question remains to be settled without adversely affecting ever closer collaboration with the Irish Republic in European institutions and bi-lateral relations.

Fortunately, we are not obliged to pursue the problem, nor speculate on it. We do not legislate for posterity, but do our best to lay down stable prosperous foundations on which posterity will build as it sees fit.