

Press
Statement

RT HON PETER WALKER

9.30 HOURS/THURSDAY,
2ND JUNE 1983

Statement by the Rt Hon Peter Walker, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, at the Press Conference, at Conservative Central Office, Thursday, 2nd June 1983.

By tough negotiation, Britain has obtained considerable benefit from her membership of the European Community in the last four years -£2,500 million of budget rebates.

On the Common Agricultural Policy, whilst the proportion of the European Budget devoted to agriculture has dropped from 81 per cent under Labour to 65 per cent now, Britain's benefits from that policy have substantially increased. In fact the proportion of the Common Agricultural Budget benefitting Britain has doubled in these four years.

It has been a policy that has been good for British agriculture - indeed the most successful in Western Europe. Under Labour it was the most handicapped. It has also been good for the housewife with more than a doubling of the butter subsidy and consumer subsidies on Beef and Lamb. They have contributed to the remarkable achievement that food prices over the last year have risen by the same amount as they increased every 10 days under the last Labour Government.

Labour's policy to withdraw from Europe would be disastrous for the British farmer and for the British taxpayer. A deficiency payment scheme to replace the CAP would cost a socialist Chancellor more than £3 billion per year.

We are now improving our exports of food to Europe and reducing our imports. The future potential for improvement would be destroyed. This, combined with other elements such as the nationalisation of rented agricultural land and the rating of agricultural land, would be very damaging - damaging to one of the success stories of the British Economy.

Perhaps, however, it would fit in with the plan announced in a Policy Statement by Labour Party Common Market Safeguards Committee, an organisation that has amongst its Presidents and Vice Presidents Michael Foot, John Silkin, Tony Benn, Norman Buchan and Barbara Castle "there is no particular merit in having an Agricultural Industry".

Whilst Labour's policy to withdraw from Europe would bring with it many disasters the Alliance policy of doing away with the power of vetoing measures that are against Britain's national interest would substantially weaken our position on benefits from Europe.

David Steel has made it clear in a broadcast that he is in favour of going over to majority voting by the Member Countries in the Council of Ministers. I can assure you on the basis of majority voting Britain's butter subsidy would not last, and the Beef Premium Scheme and the Sheep Premium Scheme would be destroyed and our negotiating success in areas of agriculture and fishing would certainly come to an end. I find it very surprising that one of the parties contesting this Election should come out with a proposal designed to weaken our negotiating position in this way.

We achieved a Common Fishing Policy providing Britain with better ^{performance} ~~performance~~ in the waters surrounding our country than we have ever previously enjoyed and providing us with a long term stability and prospects of growth. That agreement would never have been reached on the basis of majority voting.

There is no doubt for British Agriculture, for the British Fishing Industry and stable prices only a Conservative Government can give us a guaranteed place in Europe which will enable us to achieve these objectives.