

EURO-SCEPTICISM IS NOT LIBERTARIANISM



ANTOINE CLARKE

A number of libertarians are supporting campaigns by “Euro-sceptics” to hinder the process of European Federal Union. They do so because they oppose the notion of a “super-state”. They believe the United Kingdom has a more libertarian government (i.e. less statist) than any other component of the European Union. However, the basis for such a campaign rests on a number of premises and uneasy alliances which may be at odds with libertarian objectives.

That there are grounds for doubting the view that a United States of Europe will solve all the social problems of Great Britain is undeniable. Yet I would like to offer three objections to the view that libertarians should support Euro-scepticism. I do so, aware that it is becoming increasingly fashionable to “bash the federalists”.

EUROFEDERALISM ISN'T EUROCOMMUNISM

The first objection is that the European Union is not as out of step as the views of many of its critics. The drive for European togetherness seemed like a good idea when there were three million Soviet troops just across the Elbe, in much the same way as the Germanic tribes allied themselves with Rome against Attila in 451. However, Brian Micklethwait once remarked after the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1991 that this would be the end of the federalist European project.¹ I thought so too, although the existence of careers for diplomats and politicians in the European institutions was not to be over-looked. Whatever else has changed in the world, the fusion of the Western bit of Europe has not slackened, nor is it bound to falter, with Sweden, Finland and

Austria likely to join the EU in 1995. The basic reason why the European Union has not fallen apart like Yugoslavia, is that it is not a coercive union, but an integral part of what former President of the USA George Bush liked to call “the New World Order”. To ordinary people, that is to say everyone except constitutional jurisprudence experts, frustrated nationalists and some politicians, European Union means easier access to foreign products and holidays, no war, and less important politicians than the real busy-bodies in Westminster.

The idea that we don't need four Trident submarines after the collapse of the Soviet Union is plausible to people who did not support unilateral nuclear disarmament in the 1980s. The idea that we don't need cheap wine, good cars, a wider choice of food, no visas to travel to France and so forth because the Cold War is over is, however, harder to digest. Yet this is precisely the way many people regard negative attitudes towards the EU. Tim Evans and Russell Lewis, in *Europe at Risk*,² list a number of lunacies proposed by the European Commission from the Euro-condom to making Vitamin C a prescribable drug. However, in an LA publication Dr Evans writes:

As the products of an increasingly globalised environment many voters find themselves at odds with those politicians who appear to endlessly talk about such old-fashioned, backward-looking and anachronistic concepts as national sovereignty and the “independent nation state”. To the young of the modern [Europe], such rhetoric seems to be [...] destined, like Marxism, to be consigned to the dustbin of history.³

It isn't enough that there are vested interests in favour of keeping the Gravy Train running: the recipients of subsidies and the distributors of “favours” should be added to politicians and bureaucrats with a big stage to play on, especially if you come from Luxemburg.⁴ Communism did that too in many countries. The fall of Communism followed the collapse of the Communist ideal. The ideal of a united Europe is one of enjoying access to wider markets and a cosmopolitan culture, and it leads ultimately to Globalisation.

SOCIALISM IS WHAT SOCIALISTS DO

Of course “Euro-sceptics” will point to elements of European Commission activity which appear to hamper international trade, in ideas as much as in goods: the 1991 Directive “Broadcasting without Frontiers” proposes quotas



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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

so that a majority of drama, documentaries and educational programmes should be EU produced.⁵ However, this should be seen in the context of nation states which are not allowing unrestricted freedom of expression and where broadcasting independence is at best a novel idea. In France for instance it is now a criminal offence to publish Nazi revisionist text books and an offence to use English words in advertisements. In the United Kingdom it is a criminal offence to sell video copies of *The Evil Dead*.

I suggest to those people who worry about the direction taken by the European Commission that this is an agenda put forward by the politicians who were appointed in the 1980s (Socialists in France, Spain, Greece, Italy, Heathite "Wets" in Germany, Netherlands and the United Kingdom). If the UK had had a Labour government in 1983, the tide of Socialism would have been far worse. (I'm discounting the Labour Manifesto pledge to pull out of the EEC, it would have been squashed the minute the money ran out in the Treasury). The upholders of British sovereignty who denounce attacks by Brussels on freedom are not prominent in their support for Scottish independence on the grounds that most Scots haven't voted for Conservative policies since 1979. As Unionists⁶ they argue that it is up to the Labour Party to win a majority in the country as a whole.

The attempts to create a "Fortress Europe" are really no different from "Euro-scepticism": the Eurocentrist isolationists are trying to block out the Globalisation of capitalism, where the "Euro-sceptics" are trying to block out pan-euro-peanism. Both are conservative reactions to change, both have the natural pessimism about the future of conservatives: the barbarians are at the gate and we can only hold out for a little while longer. Both are therefore negative in out-look, the Eurocentrists less so than their nationalist counterparts, because they don't want to turn the clocks back so much as forwards two hours, then STOP!

Both sides must therefore lose. The nationalists can only pull out of the European Federal Union at the cost of becoming an insignificant force in the world. They cannot have even the aura of the British Empire back, far less its prestige. The Eurocentrist Socialists are being swept out across Europe and any attempt to keep global markets in a box will fail as usual.

1688 AND ALL THAT

My third assault on the idea that libertarians should ally themselves with Euro-sceptics comes to me as a conclusion from their most effective campaign. As unintended consequences go, this one is spectacular. In 1993, a group of peers, political enthusiasts and constitutional experts set out to prove that the Maastricht Treaty was illegal, that the Foreign Secretary was a traitor, and that under English Law, none of this could be allowed to happen. The whole sorry episode has been chronicled by Rodney Atkinson and Norris McWhirter in their book *Treason at Maastricht: the Destruction of the British Constitution*.⁷

I'm sure that most what they have to say is true. The Euro-sceptics claim that as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, the United Kingdom is no longer an independent nation state and that significant freedoms have been lost. Any reader of the LA's *Free Life* magazine could have told them the latter. What is bizarre about the Euro-sceptic case is that they appear to have missed the whole paraphernalia of criminal law passed in the last two decades. According to the moral values preached by "Our Sovereign Government", such things as selling tickets for Wimbledon, sitting in the back

seat of a car without a harness and owning two shotguns without separate licences are equivalent to rape, murder and arson. The right to silence and trial by jury are on the brink of disappearance thanks to Mr Howard's Criminal Justice Bill.

None of the measures listed above, nor indeed those infringements of individual freedom catalogued by the LA,⁸ were inspired by the European Union. In fact on matters of sexual freedom, freedom of expression and the ability to enjoy a party, even harmonization to the European average would create greater freedom in certain areas. To sum up, the Euro-sceptics are complaining that the United Kingdom's unwritten constitutional freedoms are worth the paper they're written on. What a pity.

ANTI OR PRO?

Having argued that the nationalist attack on Eurocentrism is based on feeble premises or outright nonsense, the question arises as to what libertarians ought to do in the face of the European Union project. There are many possibilities. I don't propose to enumerate them because I am bound to miss some, and in any case it's a free world: why should anyone follow my prescription? Instead I will leave anyone reading this with two questions. First, why treat European state institutions and their existing personnel any differently from British ones? Second, if it's worthwhile trying to change the British state through involvement in the Westminster parties, why not do the same in Brussels and Strasbourg; if it isn't worth it in Brussels or Strasbourg, why assume that it is in Westminster?

NOTES

1. For once this is a Micklethwaitism that has not appeared in print. The occasion as I recall, was a discussion about the then novel idea that Poland, Hungary and the then Czechoslovak Federal Republic might join the European Community.
2. Particularly noteworthy is Council Directive 92/58/EEC of 24 June 1992, on the *Minimum Requirement for the Provision of Safety and Health Signs at Work (Ninth Individual Directive Within the Meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)*. It states the "Minimum Requirements for Verbal Communication" and would have to be quoted in full to do justice to the complete insanity of the document. See page 9 in Tim Evans and Russell Lewis, *Europe at Risk: Bureaucratic Betrayal of the European Ideal*, Adam Smith Institute, London, 1993.
3. See Tim Evans, *The Globalisation of Capitalism: A Celebration of the Triumph of Free Market Sophistication*, Sociological Notes No. 16, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1992, p. 4.
4. In French: "Luxembourg".
5. Evans and Lewis, op cit, p 15.
6. I use the word in the strict sense of supporting the United Kingdom as a political entity, without necessary reference to Northern Ireland.
7. Rodney Atkinson and Norris McWhirter, *Treason at Maastricht: The Destruction of the British Constitution*, Compuprint Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1994.
8. See especially:
 - Sean Gabb, *Gun Control in Britain*, Political Notes No. 33, 1988.
 - Paul Staines, *Acid House Parties Against The Lifestyle Police and the Safety Nazis*, Political Notes No. 55, 1991.
 - Rt. Hon J. Enoch Powell, *The Drug Trafficking Act Versus Natural Justice*, Legal Notes No. 2, 1987.
 - Sean Gabb, *The Full Coercive Apparatus of a Police State: Thoughts on the Dark Side of the Thatcher Decade*, Legal Notes No. 6, 1989.
 - Anthony Furlong, *Sado-Masochism and the Law: Consent Versus Paternalism*, Legal Notes No. 12, 1991.
 - Ted Goodman, *Censorship: The Current Legal Position in Britain (March 1991)*, Legal Notes No. 14, 1991.For an exposition of the fallacy that the British Constitution was ever designed by libertarians see: Sean Gabb, *Liberty Versus Libertarianism: How Liberalism Neither Created Nor Defended English Liberty*, Libertarian Heritage No. 9, 1992.