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Whatever the motives of those who have initiated it, there can be no objection in principle to the public discussion and evaluation of the benefits and losses arising out of Britain's membership of the EEC. On the contrary, I believe that such discussion can serve two important purposes. First, it can help to ensure that the British Government is not allowed to neglect the opportunities for securing national advantage which our membership of the Community offers. Second, continuous public assessment of the practical implications of Community policy can help to forge that greater degree of European consciousness among our citizens upon which the long term success of our participation in the European adventure must depend.

But if public enquiry into the effects of membership is to be constructive and useful, it is essential that it is conducted within a framework of pertinent questions and relevant criteria. So far the most notable characteristic of the approach of those attempting to discredit the Community has been their persistent refusal to measure Britain's gains and losses fairly and honestly against realistic yardsticks.

Take, for example, the use the anti-market<sup>visible</sup>ers have made of our trade deficit with the rest of the Community. It is true that this deficit - which in 1976 was £ 2,077 million - stands in startling and sorry contrast to the high hopes of an immense improvement in our trade balance held out by many of the advocates of EEC membership in the period before Britain's accession. But to suggest, as do the opponents of the Community, that the size of the deficit is a direct index of the harm which membership is alleged to have inflicted is profoundly

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and wilfully misleading. Nearly all the detailed forecasts of the economic consequences of membership before 1973 have proved to be mistaken. But this has not been because the forecasters misjudged the nature of the Community. Instead it is a consequence of two events which nobody can be fairly criticised for failing to foresee: first, the severity of the world economic crisis through which we have lived since the oil price increase in 1973; and second, the manner in which the British Government pursued policies which needlessly exacerbated that upheaval's domestic economic effect.

Against the background of these events, the apposite and important question to ask is not whether the original and now unrealistic goals for an improvement in Britain's economy have been achieved, but whether our membership of the Community has aggravated or reduced the damage which inflation and recession have inevitably caused.

On the basis of this test, there can be no doubt that membership has been to Britain's advantage. By providing access to a vast tariff free market on their door-step, membership of the Community has provided British exporters with unprecedented incentives and opportunities to which they have not been slow to respond. Between 1972, the last year before we joined, and the first quarter of 1977 British exports to the EEC rose by 282% in value or 87% in real terms. By contrast British exports to the rest of the world rose by only 49% in real terms over the same period.

A recent estimate has suggested that the additional opportunities offered to our export industries by membership of the Community could currently be saving something in the order of 450,000 jobs.

If one factor which the anti-marketeters refuse to weigh in the balance is the grim reality of an economic crisis for which the Community has no responsibility, another is a realistic appraisal of the alternatives to membership. Is there any other way that Britain can hope to secure as valuable a market for her goods? Equally important is there some way other than by cooperation with her European partners that Britain can hope to bring effective weight to bear in negotiations affecting Britain's relations with countries outside the Community?

Challenged with this question the opponents of the market remain stubbornly mute, for they know they have nothing to offer but isolation and indigence. Although, of course, this is a price which some of them would be quite content to pay in return for what they believe would be an enhanced opportunity to construct a closed collectivised socialist State.

But if for Britain there is no acceptable alternative to the Community, that does not mean that there is no alternative to the Community in its present form.

The Community is not immutable, nor is it impervious to constructive efforts by its Members to secure changes in its policies. Too often, the Community is thought of as a distinct and autonomous body outside the United Kingdom with which the British Government has to negotiate

in much the same fashion as it negotiates with other external bodies, for example, the I.M.F. The reality is quite different. The Community is a political system of which Britain is a vital part. And within that system Britain has considerable potential influence which it can, and should use to achieve reforms.

For example, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that those features of the Common Agricultural Policy which the British find wasteful and absurd need to be tolerated in perpetuity. The basic principles of the CAP are unquestionably sound. In a world where the population is growing at terrifying speed, action to ensure greater security of supply and stability of price by achieving a large measure of self-sufficiency in temperate food stuffs must be sensible. Of course there is a price to be paid. But it is salutary to reflect that the development in the sixties of indigenous energy sources within the United Kingdom would have entailed greater expense than continued reliance on cheap Middle East oil. Yet who would now regret having incurred it?

At the same time, however, the CAP undeniably suffers from some unsightly blemishes - in particular from excessive and expensive surpluses of skimmed milk powder and butter. The British Government has frequently and publicly grumbled about these. But what concrete measures has it put forward to achieve reform? It is instructive to remember that the British Agriculture Minister, Mr. John Silkin brought the negotiations of the last Farm Price Package almost to the point of total breakdown not in an attempt to achieve a reduction in the size of costly surpluses, but in order to win a butter subsidy which will actually increase the burden which the CAP imposes on the Community's taxpayers!

Britain is not alone in wanting to see a reform of the working of the CAP. Any specific proposals which she puts forward will be listened to with great interest. But I must add that the prospects of British recommendations eliciting a positive response are likely to be greatly improved if her partners are convinced that the Government which makes them is whole heartedly committed to the principle of membership, and to making the Community work. Mr. Silkin has just announced that his approach to future negotiations within the EEC will be " tough, partial and even pugnacious ".

Is this really the right way to enter discussions among friends? If that is the attitude the British take can they legitimately complain if others reply in kind? Of course British Ministers must stand up for the national interest, but if they thought more in Community terms, and took a wider view, they would be more likely both to secure their own objectives and to advance the interests of everyone else.

So far I have spoken a great deal about figures. But in the end the issue of our membership transcends narrowly defined considerations of national balance sheets. It also concerns an ancient and great nation's moral and historical destiny.

The possession and practice of many of Britain's highest ideals - democracy social justice, equality of opportunity and respect for the liberty of the individual - are part of a common European heritage. In the Community the leading nations of Europe have come together to protect and enrich that unique heritage in the greatest and most imaginative peacetime political experiment which the world has seen for centuries. It is desperately

important for mankind that it should succeed.

Throughout the world our ideals are under siege. In many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America they are being trampled under foot. The same is also tragically true of Eastern Europe.

This imposes upon us, the people of the European Community, a special responsibility. We must show that the ideals in which we believe can work in practice. We must show that old proud Nation States can sink their differences and pool their strength. And we must show that freedom enables men and women to live happier, more fulfilled and more useful lives than is possible under any other system.

The creation of the European Community makes it much more likely than would otherwise be the case that our ideals will survive and that Western Europe will provide the world with the example it so desperately needs.

It is in these terms that we should consider British Membership of the Community, and, against this background, we should ask not just what we can get out of it but also what we can contribute.

Despite our present domestic afflictions, the rest of Europe recognises that Britain's unrivalled legacy of political skill and her longstanding traditions of tolerance and social concern, make us, potentially, one of the most effective champions of the Community's future progress.

Thirty years ago Winston Churchill expressed the hope that Britain would help to build a Europe "purged of the slavery of ancient days in which men will be proud to say "I am a European" as once they were to say "civus Romanus sum"." I remain confident that in the end Britain will rise to the challenge which that vision presents.