

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

A Resounding "yes" for Europe

The "renegotiation objectives" and the complex antecedents of the British Referendum of 1975 were described by Professor K. R. Simmonds in a Note in the last issue of this Review*. Although the result of the Referendum, a resounding "yes" for Europe, was widely expected, an analysis of the votes cast in this singular constitutional exercise is both illuminating and surprising. The result of the referendum was declared on Friday, June 6. Amendments to the original Referendum Bill, conceded after debate in the Commons, modified the provisions defining those persons entitled to vote so as to include certain persons not on current electoral registers and to permit special voting arrangements in some cases. Arrangements for the counting of the votes cast were modified in important particulars so as to permit a limited separate count and declaration of votes by region and area, rather than by constituency as in Parliamentary elections. Of a total of 25,848,654 votes cast, representing a percentage turnout of 64% of the total eligible electorate, 17,378,581 votes were cast in favour of the United Kingdom remaining within the European Economic Community and 8,470,073 were cast against. In the various regions the results were as follows:—

England	Votes for 14,918,009	Votes against 6,812,052
Wales	869,135	472,071
Scotland	1,332,186	948,039
Northern Ireland	259,251	237,911

The average percentage vote for remaining within the Community was 67.2%; only two areas, the Western Isles and Shetland, with very small electorates and major local economic preoccupations, produced a majority of votes against what was otherwise an overwhelming general national endorsement of the Government's recommendation that the electorate should vote "yes". The percentage turnout was surprisingly high and in fact only some 7% below that obtaining in the last October, 1974, General Election. The largest percentages of votes cast in favour of remaining within the Community were found in the South East of England. These percentages were generally lower in the major conurbations, including that of Greater London and those of Tyneside and Wearside. Substantially lower "yes" votes were recorded in the Scottish areas of Fife, Strathclyde, Grampian, Lothian and Central Scotland.

* 12 C.M.L.Rev. 1975, at pp. 258-260.

The lowest "yes" vote, and by far the lowest turnout, occurred, much as expected, in Northern Ireland. The 64.8% "yes" vote in Wales was in many ways the most unexpected feature of the entire result.

Britain's membership has thus at last been laid to rest as an issue after some seventeen years of uncertainty, three applications, two vetoes, one formal entry, and one (alleged) renegotiation of the terms of entry. The decision of the British electorate has been quickly accepted by some of the most notable of the opponents of membership. The British delegation to the European Parliament has been recast now that the Parliamentary Labour Party is to be represented, and the Trades Union Congress has announced that it will now ensure that places on the Economic and Social Committee and other consultative organs are taken up. Yet it would be foolish to expect that the present British Government, even armed with the Referendum majority, will in the future come to be counted amongst the more enthusiastic supporters of European unity. The effects of the Referendum are more likely, at least in the short term, to be reflected in the balances within British domestic political life. The Referendum debate, especially in its closing stages, took on a very domestic character; the future development of the Community at this time of severe economic constraints was discussed by inference rather than by intent. The Referendum of 1975 will not enable Britain to provide the political response within the Community which its partners are entitled to look for at this juncture but it may well come to be regarded as a watershed in British political life and in its form of representative Parliamentary democracy.