

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

The integration debate

It seems incredible to recall that only eight years ago the British Labour Party was firmly anti-European and committed to taking the United Kingdom out of the Community. At that time we viewed the matter sufficiently seriously that we decided to dedicate an Editorial Comment to it (Labour's love's lost, 18 CML Rev. (1981), No. 4, 443-445). Since then, the Labour Party's policy has changed and it now promotes itself as being committed to Britain's future in Europe.

At the same time, in a change that no one could have predicted, the British Conservative party appears to be experiencing difficulties in coming to terms with the movement towards European integration. The Conservatives, traditionally pro-European (it was Mr. Heath and Mr. Geoffrey Rippon – as he then was – who brought the United Kingdom into the Community), have been recently expressing public misgivings about their commitment to Europe, and the issue has dominated national political argument for the last six months. The difficulties arise from the philosophy which Mrs. Thatcher expounded in her famous Bruges speech and which was more recently on show during the Madrid summit. Essentially, the debate is as to whether the United Kingdom has the political will to go as far and as quickly down the path to European integration as its 11 partners and, particularly, as Mr. Jacques Delors, would wish.

Some initial salvos in this battle were fired even before the Madrid Summit began. The United Kingdom's resistance to, as it saw it, en-

croaching or creeping competence of the Community, led it to take some much-publicised stances, including its opposition to a Community-wide common card for pensioners, to Community plans for the promotion of foreign language teaching and to Community rules on warnings concerning smoking. At the same time, it was announced that British ministers would scrutinise proposed legislation in all areas more closely to ensure that competence was exercised by the Community only where expressly attributed by the Treaties.

Two issues dominated the Madrid summit: Mr. Delors' plan for the step-by-step establishment of full economic and monetary union, and the charter aimed at strengthening social provision and workers' rights through the Community at the same time as the internal market opens up new opportunities for capital after 1992. Mrs. Thatcher opposed these two proposals. She believes that the plan for economic and monetary union, leading eventually to a central bank and single currency, would mean an unacceptable surrender of sovereignty over such vital matters as taxation. The social charter would, in her view, entail a degree of regulation which cuts across everything she believes essential to an enterprise economy (and it was central to her Bruges speech that she would not tolerate the re-introduction of socialism in Britain through the back-door via Brussels).

Perhaps prompted by the Conservative Party's poor showing in the British elections for the European Parliament (which seemed to indicate that the British voter was considerably more pro-European than was Mrs. Thatcher's wing of the Tory Party), the United Kingdom agreed, however, to the first step of the Delors plan for economic and monetary union – closer cooperation in monetary policy and increased economic coordination within the Community's existing institutional framework. The United Kingdom Government emphasised that it had made no commitment to go further, although the essence of the Delors plan was that acceptance of the first stage should entail acceptance of the package as a whole.

The other main decision in Madrid was that work will start on preparing an intergovernmental conference to be held in the second half of 1990 or the first half of 1991, to lay down the subsequent stages in a new Treaty concerning economic and monetary union. At the United King-

dom's insistence the conference is to be preceded by full and adequate preparation but it may be convened by majority vote. The conference's conclusions, however, must be adopted unanimously, and all Treaty changes or new Treaty provisions must be ratified by each national parliament.

We do not want to examine here whether 11 Member States should go ahead with a new Treaty excluding the United Kingdom while all 12 are still bound by the existing Treaties, as has been suggested by President Mitterand if the United Kingdom's position were to remain intransigent: such a proceeding would be hideously complicated but probably it could be done. Instead we would point out that the Twelve must proceed together or be poorer, and not just materially, in the long term.

Part of the difficulties which have arisen owe much to a certain perception of the British stance, and this perception, not always justified, tends to isolate the United Kingdom and to hinder the decision-making process. In fact, decision-making at the Community level is arrived at through discussion: dissent or objections to certain plans or to creeping competence are legitimate elements of this process. No participant has a monopoly on the Community ideal. There are many ways through the forest, many ways to achieve integration (see for example Mrs. Scrivener's drastic alteration to the VAT plans put forward by Lord Cockfield as an essential, nay a hallowed, part of his White Paper).

Europe is faced today with a new international challenge: underlying shifts are opening up Eastern Europe, reviving the "German question" and redrawing the Cold War political map. The Community's *rendez-vous* is not just with itself — it is with the world; it is not merely economic in character, it is also political and social. When such weighty matters are at stake, when goals are as lofty, discussion and debate and, yes, horse trading are necessary and possibly desirable elements in achieving the consensus which is the only satisfactory means of moving forward. In this sense, when the present policy problems have been resolved and once consensus is reached, Mrs. Thatcher's stand, incorporating as it does many sentiments which are entirely proper for a national leader to have (see her concern over the growth of drug-abuse in the context of a frontierless Europe) and which are shared by others who are hailed as pro-European, may hopefully be seen in retrospect to have been positive

and useful in achieving the integration which is wanted by the majority of the peoples of Europe. Above all, whatever Mrs. Thatcher's distaste for certain developments, we can only applaud her determination not to adopt a Gaullist empty seat policy but to take an active part in the decision-making process from within.