

WHY ANTI-FEDERALISTS MUST NOT UNITE (AND ABOVE ALL NOT HAVE A REFERENDUM)

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Editorial Introduction: Not all British libertarians dislike Britain being part of the European Union, even if most do. As Helen Szamuely points out, nothing like all British opponents of the EU are libertarians. The anti-EU project and libertarianism only overlap. Helen Szamuely's aims are libertarian; but, more intriguingly, so too are her preferred methods for achieving them. Even those who care nothing about the EU debate would gain from reading on, for much of what follows applies to campaigning generally, and to the libertarian movement itself.

Almost every day, it seems, another six people wake up in the morning and decide that something must be done about the shocking affair of British membership of the European Union (sometimes calling it the EC or even the Common Market). Then, instead of looking around, they decide that *absolutely nobody is doing anything about it* and it is up to them to start something. If these people happen to be fully paid up libertarians, they confine themselves to writing about it and lecturing anyone who will listen and many who will not. Non-libertarians — alas, still the overwhelming majority — form a new group and hold a meeting. Recently, these have progressed to “brain storming sessions”. As soon as they hold a meeting they realize that they do not really know what they are going to do. So, instead of finding other groups that are already doing something and, perhaps, joining them, they rather pompously proclaim that this disunity must end and all groups must unite into one grand coalition to fight ... well what? Possibly in a referendum, possibly nothing special, just against the general chicanery of the “pro-Europeans”. (I use quotation marks because I dislike the terms “pro-European” and “anti-European”. Firstly, one cannot be pro or anti a continent. Secondly, so-called euro-sceptics are often, though not always, people who know and understand other European countries considerably better than euro-philes, and base their opposition to the *European Union* on that knowledge and understanding.) But to return to the never ending new groups: even when they reluctantly accept the old and rather weary arguments about why the groups *cannot* unite, they can very rarely see that they *should not* unite. One finds the same reluctance to accept the argument that we must at all costs avoid a referendum. Wilful blindness is caused in both cases by the same basic misunderstanding of the political situation: many of

these euro-sceptics are convinced that the vast majority of the people in this country is with us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

VAGUE UNFOCUSED OPPOSITION

There is, indeed, a general feeling of dissatisfaction with what is vaguely described as Europe. This is rarely focused and even more rarely based on any knowledge or understanding. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, the most obvious one being the complexity and obscurity of the whole problem. It is very hard to understand how the European Union is set up, how it influences British politics, to keep up with the extraordinary amount of legislation that emanates from it, to disentangle where euro-legislation ends and British implementation begins and so on. Added to which, there has been a resolute and successful attempt on the part of the mostly euro-phile establishment, whether in politics, the civil service or the media, to obscure the basic very simple question, which is made up of two parts: Should the United Kingdom be an independent country?, and; Should it be a free country? The vague, unfocused opposition is easily blown off-course. Most people, despite their dislike for euro-legislation, consider euro-sceptics to be something of a joke and would prefer not to be associated with them. They readily acknowledge that the subject is far too boring to think or do anything about. And, finally and most damningly, they can easily be fobbed off with seemingly unanswerable but rather silly arguments. Should we ever have a referendum on the single currency, many people will vote in favour, simply because they would have convinced themselves that it would make changing money when they go on holiday unnecessary. Too late, they will realize that they would still have to change money if they go to, say, the United States and, in any case, with rising unemployment as a result of EMU, they will be unlikely to take too many holidays.

The point is that to plan activity on the assumption that anti-federalists enjoy huge support in the country is foolhardy. I may add that, despite the much discussed popular movements on the Continent, only in Norway did the anti-EU side managed to defeat (barely) the euro-phile establishment.

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

What of the people who have been hit by euro-regulations? Their numbers are becoming ever larger and they ought to join the struggle against the tentacled monster. Unfortunately, few of them understand, or even want to do so, that the disaster that had befallen them is not some isolated act of fate, but part of a larger pattern. Many decide that the best thing to do is to lobby in Brussels, thus adding to the problems, since the European Community, the most integrated economic part of the Union, is run not in accordance with any particular democratic principles but in response to various lobbying groups, the largest and most powerful being the bureaucracy in charge. Others, who cannot or do not want to lobby, persist in believing that the problem is unique to them. They do not want to hear about other aspects or discuss solutions. At last year's large rally of fishermen (arguably the most hard-done-by group in this country) Lord Pearson's attempt to link the Common Fisheries Policy with various other issues and to show the whole picture, were met with jeers and whistles. All the fishermen seemed to want was to be told over and over again how badly they had been treated. They refused to accept that they would get nowhere without some understanding of other matters. Some are beginning to see the light. I felt some optimism when I had a telephone call from a skipper in the Shetlands who asked for a written explanation of the system of qualified majority voting. But this is very rare. In Leninist terms we have not succeeded in politicizing the people who have a sense of grievance against the EU.

It is, therefore, quite blindingly obvious that it is the battle of ideas we must win. This will have to consist of two parts: we

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must, as I have said above, politicize all those with a sense of grievance and try to make them understand how their problem fits into the larger jig-saw puzzle. At present our resources are too limited to do more than scratch the surface of that problem. More importantly and more pragmatically, we must change the opinion of the establishment. Some work has been done already. Neither the political nor the journalistic and media establishment is as united in its support for the European Union as it used to be for its predecessors. Doubts have crept in even among academics who, it sometimes seems, have been bought wholesale by the various Brussels-financed programmes. But we still have a long way to go.

THERE WERE NEVER GOING TO BE MORE THAN 800,000 VOTES FOR UKIP AND THE REFERENDUM PARTY

Nothing proves my point about the lack of true popular support better than the low vote in the last General Election for the two parties which were perceived to stand against European integration and Britain's involvement in it. (I am talking about perception rather than the strict truth of what the Referendum Party stood for — not an easy matter to discern.) As a matter of fact, given the British system and British political attitudes, the two parties did rather well. They did not see it that way. Incredibly, a number of candidates expected to win, though it was clear that they would do well to retain their deposits. Hardly any did. Many factors can be and have been blamed: leading personalities, incompetent campaign managers, inexperienced candidates, refusal to co-ordinate activities. All of these contributed to the *débâcle*. In the end, however, the reason was very straightforward: there was not enough popular support for the ideas advanced for the British electorate to change its normal voting pattern. Or rather, there was a significant change, but not in the way anti-federalist activists expected it. People expressed their disquiet and dissatisfaction by staying away, not by voting for small parties. This would not have been any different even if the two parties had come to some kind of an electoral arrangement. They may well have had even fewer votes.

“BUT IF WE ALL UNITED, IT WOULD BE DIFFERENT”

Parallel to the fallacy of widespread popular support runs the fallacy that if we all united we would present a formidable force capable of fighting a big battle like a referendum campaign. To compound this folly, many anti-federalists have actually called for a referendum, which, as a moment's thought would show them, we should certainly lose, united or otherwise.

There are historical and political as well as personal reasons for the existence of the various groups. Unification would be almost impossible on grounds of personality alone. There are, as we know, far too many prima-donnas in the political world, particularly on its fringes. Furthermore, the groups are not likely to hand over the running of their affairs, their membership lists and, above all, their money to some self-appointed leader. (As things stand any leader will have to be self-appointed.) Then there is the question of the overlap in membership. If all the groups united, it would become quite clear that between them they have no more than three to five thousand members. The famous Referendum Party list was not one of active members.

More importantly, each group or, at least, each more or less serious group, exists for a different purpose and pursues different aims. Far from being a weakness, this is the movement's greatest — possibly only — strength. To a number of euro-sceptics this sounds like a paradox, but that is because they have not considered political reality seriously and prefer to wallow in wishful thinking. Unification would make sense if we had the following attributes: huge financial and human resources, unequivocal popular support, an undisputed and capable leader, far more of the establishment on our side. All of these are essential; just one or two are insufficient, as those who flocked to the Ref-

erendum Party found. At the moment we do not have any of them. We do, however, have reasonably well-organized groups, each of whom (the ones who actually know what they are doing) can concentrate on one section of the front. They are usually in touch with each other, can exchange information and give each other help. Because they concentrate on different sections, they can give the impression of involving more people than they actually do. There are groups within both the major parties and the trade union movement; there are groups or individuals who concentrate on producing published material of varying intellectual quality and popularity; there is at least one group whose purpose it is to conduct a campaign through leafleting, local meetings and correspondence in the local press. Not only they cover a great deal of ground but the overlap in membership does not matter: each group works with the members it has and instead of an overlap we have a multiple.

It is more difficult to sabotage many groups than one, should our opponents wish to do so. At present, if one group is destroyed through infiltration of some sort, the others carry on. What would have happened if the whole “movement” had been united under the leadership of UKIP, as was suggested repeatedly in the last couple of years? Its problems would have destroyed the whole cause of euro-scepticism. As it is, not a great deal of harm has been done. The rest of us can carry on and even UKIP may revive.

For a number of small groups the fact that popular support is unfocused and half-hearted is not a problem. We become, as Mao said, like fish in water. The general dissatisfaction with the EU means that many people will give us some support, as long as they are not pressurized too much into joining anything or thinking deeply about the issues. Thus, a general air of opposition is created and, possibly, picked up by the establishment.

While the majority of the establishment, both political and journalistic is either euro-ophile or content to support what appears to be the more politically correct point of view, there are those who have rebelled against the received wisdom or are in the process of doing so. By and large, especially among writers and journalists, and even academics, these tend to be the more talented and knowledgeable ones. Their work in swaying public opinion is invaluable. They and even their colleagues, who no particular views beyond supporting the majority view in their circle, often find the different groups useful as sources of information. Politicians in the House of Commons are less reliable, but even there we have found that one or two people are prepared to fight doggedly for certain issues. (Unfortunately, they often make a mess of things and cause hilarity in the media.) Politicians in the House of Lords have successfully conducted their own guerrilla activity. In return, a number of thoughtful euro-sceptics have understood the importance and usefulness of the House of Lords, thus acquiring a clearer perception of the British constitution.

AVOID BIG BATTLES

It must be obvious to all my readers (supposing they have got this far) that I am applying Leninist principles and advocating classic underground or guerrilla methodology: small, highly mobile groups that cover a great deal of ground, are not encumbered by a strict hierarchy and can react swiftly. This is, of course, a slightly idealized version of the reality, but closer to it than many outsiders, who suddenly wake up to the problem, acknowledge. It was said about the Duke of Wellington that he won the Peninsular War by avoiding battles with the French. This is not entirely true, since he did win a number of those, though they were not very large ones, and did eventually defeat Napoleon's best generals. But his tactics of avoidance are well worth pondering over. If you do not have the big battalions, avoid big battles. Instead, use the small platoons, to fight a war that is suitable to them. And remember: big battalions cannot always follow small platoons when these escape.