

EMBARGO: 2.30 p.m. ON SATURDAY 20TH NOVEMBER

PRESS RELEASE

The Rt. Hon. George Thomson, the European Commissioner for Regional Affairs, speaking as the newly elected Chairman of the European Movement at their Annual General Meeting at the Royal Commonwealth Society, Northumberland Avenue, at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday 20th November said:

The European Movement in Britain brings together men and women of all parties and of none. This is a nationwide organisation of local groups who share and show a common concern for their country and for their continent and a mutual tolerance that puts partisan politics in second place. In our society today, which is far too politically polarised, it is refreshing to find a nationwide organisation of local groups conscious that what unites them is greater than what divides them. I sometimes think it is a pity that national politics cannot capture some of the temper and largeness of vision and mutual tolerance that typifies the European Movement.

The decision to set a target date of 1978 for direct elections has presented the European Movement with a new task of vital importance. Having played a crucial part in winning the Referendum it now has to man the British battlefront in the Community campaign not only to make the European Parliament more democratic but through that to make Europe more dynamic.

We should not be too euphoric about the consequences of a directly elected Parliament. Certainly it will be a great advance in making the Community more democratic and giving it fresh vitality. But at present the European Parliament is a branch activity of national Parliaments. After direct elections it will be converted into a rival of national Parliaments, fighting for a fairer share of Parliamentary power.

It is therefore vital that amongst the British representation in the European Parliament there should be a high proportion of those who believe in Europe -- who have influence within national politics, but are prepared to do battle for a democratic Community.

In the meantime, we enter what the European Movement has rightly called Britain's year in Europe. In January a great European, Roy Jenkins, will become the first Commission President from Britain. During the critical first six months of his Presidency -- the honeymoon period -- Britain will hold the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. There is already the first British Chairman of the Economic and Social Committee, Mr. Basil de Ferranti. And one hopes to see a distinguished British Parliamentarian occupy the Presidency of the Parliament.

What a priceless, unrepeatable opportunity for Britain to prove that after the Referendum, to use the Foreign Secretary's words the other day, Britain is committed to Europe, and Britain's tenure of the Presidency will be a fitting symbol of this commitment.

The best parting gift that can be given to Roy Jenkins by the Government which he has served with such distinction, is to show by its conduct of the Presidency that the decades of doubt and division are now behind us, and that Britain sees its future and the resolution of its national problems as part of a developing European Community.

Britain can do better than simply "business as usual". The rest of the Community - to say nothing of the British people - takes it for granted that Britain will run an efficient Presidency, that the nuts and bolts will all be properly in their place and that the London European Summit will be a bright jewel in the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations.

But something more than that is needed. It will be a sad day for Britain if all we feel we need to say is that we are capable of manning a trim and tidy ship. Surely the direction in which we wish the ship to go matters.

The Community's Regional Fund and Social Fund come up for review as to their future during the British Presidency. I was glad to see the Foreign Secretary's call for a mass transfer of resources between richer and poorer regions as a necessary

condition for economic convergence and more adequate regional and social funds as the kind of thing we need.

A six months

Presidency of one Member State amongst nine cannot be expected to produce dramatic results. But if the British Presidency at the beginning of the Jenkins Commission can give the Community a new sense of urgency about the adequacy and coherence of its regional and social policies, it will have done well.

For six months large numbers of Ministers and literally hundreds of civil servants will have the day-to-day responsibility of steering the Community. I hope for is that this prize will produce the psychological change of converting what is still a cautiously off-shore political establishment into a whole-hearted participant in the search for Community solutions.