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POLICY STATEMENTS

30/75. EUROPEAN MEMBERSHIP: DEBATE ON OUTCOME OF RENEGOTIATIONS

Mr. Harold Wilson, Prime Minister,
in the House of Commons on April
7, 1975:

To remain in Europe would be "best for Britain ... and the wider world," the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, told the House of Commons on April 7, as he opened the debate on the renegotiation of terms of entry White Paper. But he emphasised that the immediate challenge facing the country is to beat inflation. In or out of the Community, Britain will sink or swim by her own efforts.

"I hope that during the great national debate no-one will ... forget for one moment that, in or out of the Community, Britain survives and prospers in direct correlation to our own efforts here in this country ... to the degree of restraint all sections ... show, particularly in relation to incomes, earned or unearned, which are sought and won, when they are not yet paid for by the gold backing of effort and economic performance...

"To be in the Market does not of itself solve any of these problems. Nor would a policy of withdrawing from the Market. Indeed, in my view, some would be harder to solve outside. Basically, the fault -- and therefore the solution -- lies not in or outside Europe: what we face is a challenge to the British people...

"So my judgment, on an assessment of all that has been achieved and all that has changed, is that to remain in the Community is best for Britain, for Europe, for the Commonwealth, for the Third World

/and ...

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and the wider world... But ... our survival, our standard of living, the future of our children, the future of our country and its influence in the world, all depend in the last resort on how we respond as a nation to a challenge which is part external, part internal -- the challenge to the resolve and resource of the people of Britain."

Entering the pre-referendum period, Mr. Wilson noted that many Members of Parliament are already "doctrinally committed" to one side or another. But for the less-committed, he invited them to assess how far the renegotiations have fulfilled the objectives set out in the Labour Party manifesto. And he stated,

"In the Government's view, we have substantially achieved the objectives set out first in 1972 and endorsed by the Labour Party in successive years since then..."

Calling the renegotiations a "catalyst of change -- and basically a change in the right direction," the Prime Minister noted that other members of the Community as a result of Britain's re-appraisal had started their own "scarcely less fundamental process of re-examination" of their positions in relation to the Community and to its development.

In reaching a decision on membership there are two ways of looking at the Community, said Mr. Wilson.

"[One is] ... to set the undoubted Treaty-created powers and constitution as the main criterion for judging the Community, and Britain's relations with it.

"The other approach is to judge the Community as an organic practical working institution where month by month decisions are taken by national representatives in the Council of Ministers and in the now-regular Heads of Government Summit meetings, to give weight to the reality of a procedure where national interests are more powerfully asserted and the spirit of give-and-take governs the discussions and inspires clear decisions and directives."

It is not only that there have been great changes in the world in the past two years; the Community itself has changed and is changing.

"... and will change further. [The nature of the Community] is changing in a way which has greatly reduced, at any rate my own, anxieties about the power of supranational institutions established by the Treaty and not responsible to political control by Ministers representing national interests. More and more the Council of Ministers

/and ...

and the Heads of Government conferences are dealing specifically with the problems on the basis of the highest common interest, and my experience, and what I have seen ... has been a total readiness of the Commission to come into line with political realities as expressed by the Council of Ministers and Heads of Government conferences."

Acknowledging the existence of a widespread view that the Commission is "over-large, over-bureaucratic, over-staffed and over-expensive," Mr. Wilson said this is not just the view of the opponents of Community membership.

"It is a view which has become articulate at the highest level in Ministerial and particularly Heads of Government discussions. A number of us have made these charges... One suggestion which I feel should be seriously considered ... is that those four larger countries [France, Germany, Italy and the U.K.] who are entitled to nominate Commissioners ... should each be content with a single Commissioner...

"Quite apart from what has been achieved in the re-negotiations ... [and from what we feel to be] a real change in [the Community's] nature and operations, the magnitude of the change in world economic conditions since 1971 ... underlines the differences ... between a decision not to enter an organization when one still has one's traditional ties and contacts, which is what we argued about in 1971, and a decision some years afterwards ... to pull out...

"Like it or not ... there have been two, three or four years in which history has not stood still. Like the history or not, this is the fact, and I should have had to be a great deal more dissatisfied with the terms which we have secured to be able to ignore that fact of history."

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