

Déjà Vu

Peter Farrell, one of our supporters has kindly passed on a transcript of a programme broadcast on Radio 4 on Thursday 3rd February 2000, entitled "A Letter to the Times". It is a shocking exposé of the underhand tactics used by a number of leading Europhiles in the run-up to our joining the EEC in 1973.

In December 1970, six months after Edward Heath's unexpected election victory, an opinion poll showed that only 18% of the UK electorate supported him in his long-term dream of taking our country into the EEC. A massive 70% were opposed. While the decision on accession was to be taken by Parliament, it was apparent to Heath that he would never gain a parliamentary majority in the face of overwhelming public opposition. While some of the tactics he used are well-known, notably disguising the political project as an economic project and not mentioning loss of sovereignty, other underhand tricks employed at this time have only come out into the open more recently.

The programme revealed one particularly successful tactic: a barrage of letters to the *Times* during the Autumn of 1970 all apparently written by MPs who supported accession. In reality, these MPs only signed them; they were all produced by an ardently pro-European PA to the MP Sir Tufton Beamish.

But how were the rest of the population, who didn't read the *Times*, to be converted? Equally clandestine methods were used. Those of us of a certain age will remember the name Jack de Manio, who presented the Today programme from 1958 until 1971 and who was twice voted British Radio Personality of the Year. He was also strongly Eurosceptic. Geoffrey Tucker, who was closely linked to Heath and who organised breakfasts for supporters of accession, lobbied for his removal. The following year, the programme was reorganised to feature two

presenters. De Manio was not happy with the new arrangement and resigned. A coincidence? Whatever, by 1971, the BBC had been effectively "nobbled." The managing director of BBC Radio, Ian Trethowan, was another friend of Edward Heath and was very willing to accede to the wishes of Geoffrey Tucker's breakfast group to deal with any broadcasters perceived to be opposed to accession. Far from being an organ of impartiality, the BBC became the main propaganda vehicle used to shift public opinion in these crucial years.

However, the most disturbing revelation in this programme was the funding of the European Movement by the American CIA. Dr Richard Aldrich, a political historian, came across the archived documents of a CIA front organisation which poured millions of dollars into the UK. In typical CIA style, the audit trail had made it difficult to trace the source of the European Movement's funding, but it seems that even the office cleaners ultimately were being paid by US intelligence!

Heath himself was interviewed in the documentary and he is heard expressing his regret that the job was never fully done. He described the subsequent rise of euroscepticism within the Conservative Party as "the most devastating blow of all." However, in view of the deceit he encouraged, such a man deserves no sympathy whatsoever. The only person to come out at all well from the programme is Roy Hattersley. Although a pro-European, he was horrified by the tactics being used during this period. He attended one of Tucker's breakfasts and was so appalled by what he heard that he never went again. In his opinion, the use of spin all those years ago, has prejudiced the argument ever since.

Telling words indeed and vital lessons for supporters of withdrawal as the referendum looms. Already, one has a sense of déjà vu as one businessman after another is given air time on the BBC saying how disastrous it would be to leave the EU. Our opponents are not going to play fair, but we cannot allow them to get away with it this time. Fool me once, shame on

you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

Photo by TechnicalFault (formerly Coffee Lover) 