

Lord Tebbit : Britain Must be Rescued from the EU

✖ Lord Tebbit of Chingford, former Cabinet Minister under Mrs. Thatcher has written this exclusive article for Get Britain Out – the cross-party Eurosceptic campaign for Britain to leave the European Union and is reproduced with permission:

Incontrovertibly, the momentum of the EU debate is swinging firmly towards those who want to Get Britain Out of the EU. This is in part due to the Great British Public becoming more aware of the EU and its activities.

In an exclusive article, former Conservative Party Chairman Lord Tebbit explains how his own experiences of dealing with Europe whilst in office under Margaret Thatcher turned him from a Europhile to a Eurosceptic.

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Some fifty or sixty years ago I was a young airline pilot. I had a higher standard of living than most of my earth bound contemporaries. I spent half of my life overseas. I had almost everything in common with my fellow airline pilots from the rest of the free world. We were mostly NATO trained and we mostly flew very similar aircraft. We all spoke English as a first or second language.

The problems we faced of poor air traffic control, poor navigation aids and airfields were common to us all and could only be solved by supranational agreement and action. We were really rather like the managers of multinational business corporations – or indeed diplomats.

So the idea of a European Economic Community – the EEC – of like minded European nations committing themselves to forming an economic and political union to solve their common

problems, seemed to be just an extension of what I already knew in the air transport industry.

I was a Europhile. And so I remained until I became a Minister in Margaret Thatcher's first administration in 1979. As a junior Minister in the Department of Trade with responsibility for civil aviation, shipping and the tourist industry, I attended meetings of the Council of Ministers in Brussels more and more often.

I enjoyed the company of my colleagues from the other member states. Our meetings were overwhelmingly good natured and constructive, but I gradually became aware of a gulf between my assumptions about the nature, the role and the limitations of government and those of my colleagues.

I can recollect being lectured on our lack of legislation on the rights of women. Eventually, looking around the table I asked: "Which of you works for a female Head of Government?" In later years I criticised because in this Kingdom we have no "right to strike". My response that since there is no law to forbid anyone (the military apart) from going on strike, we had no need of a law giving that right was met with incredulity. Gradually it dawned upon me. They all took the view the law defined what they were permitted to do. What was not permitted, they regarded as forbidden. For them freedom of speech was granted by law, but limited to what had been granted.

To us here in Britain all speech is free – unless there is a law to limit it. Alarmingly, our legislation in recent years has been implementing that European, Napoleonic view of society.

Bit by bit I came to see that our structure of government, largely built on the limitations placed on the Monarch by Magna Carta, was simply not understood by our fellow Europeans from the mainland, nor was it compatible with the continental

approach. We are free to do as we will – provided only that there is no law to prohibit it.

Few of our friends enjoyed a constitution which had not been violently overturned and re-written from scratch more than once since 1215.

Bit by bit, especially as the number of member states increased, I came to the conclusion the “European” destination of “ever closer political union” was not a destination for the United Kingdom. Indeed I now believe the diversity of cultures between the nations of the north and south of the continent is too great to be bridged for the other member states too.

This has been underlined by the botched enforcement of the single currency which has done so much damage to the economies south of “the olive line” and is now threatening Germany too.

Of course there are still plenty of people who have not progressed beyond the views I held half a century ago.

However, I now have no doubt both our history and the needs of our contemporary society and economy demand we must rescue Britain from what I fear is a political and economic construct which cannot work for us – and may well not work for our friends on the mainland.

Lord Tebbit of Chingford

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