

# Sir Teddy Taylor RIP

Sir Teddy Taylor shares with a number of colleagues – and with the Campaign for Independent Britain – the rare distinction of having campaigned against British membership of the then Common Market even before the UK joined in 1973. He was one of the first politicians of any party to make a principled stand on the European issue, famously resigning from his post as a Scottish Office minister over Edward Heath's insistence on taking Britain into the European project.

After the devastating blows of British accession to the Common Market and defeat in the 1975 referendum, Teddy refused to bow down and, through a series of groups with innocuous titles such as the European Reform Information Centre and Conservative European Reform Group, set about subverting the Conservative Party – then probably the most europhile of all the major parties.

Now, before today's hardliners throw a fit at the word 'reform', it has to be remembered that arguing for change was then the only way of putting the political and economic defects of the Common Market onto the agenda at all, and, perhaps, sowing the first seeds of doubt in the overwhelmingly pro-Common Market Tory Party. The political landscape in the early 1980s was so hostile to what we now call Euroscepticism that 'withdrawal' was a truth that dared not yet speak its name. Indeed, that vital tipping point in the story of Euroscepticism did not come until the early 1990s, when 'reforming Europe' ceased to be a shorthand for "let's get out" and became instead the siren call of Conservatives and others, who, when confronted with the myriad failings of the EU, wanted to see it miraculously change so that Britain could happily remain a part of it.

Teddy recognized that freeing Britain from the EEC was probably going to be a long and intergenerational struggle. He

encouraged and befriended young Eurosceptic campaigners and – a born activist himself – enthusiastically joined in their guerrilla war against the ‘leadership’ of the dismally pro-Brussels Young Conservatives. Politics alongside Teddy was never dull, with every European lunacy being summarily dispatched with his catchphrase put-down “it’s absolutely horrendous!” – generally delivered through plumes of cigarette smoke. (Teddy eventually gave up the ciggies, but never his dream of an independent Britain.)

Meanwhile, the European project continued to be controlled by an ever-centralizing political process, which saw the creation of the European Union, complete with flag, citizenship, and – shortly – single currency, under the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Unsurprisingly, Teddy joined with other patriotic colleagues in Westminster in opposing Maastricht tooth and nail – becoming one of the ‘whipless wonders’ who were kicked out of the parliamentary Conservative Party for their temerity.

By the mid-1990s, the gloves were coming off and the word ‘withdrawal’ was increasingly being voiced, first as a whisper and then with growing confidence, in the ranks of the Conservative Party. True, there remained (and still is) a massive disconnect between the views of the increasingly Eurosceptic grassroots Tory membership and the leadership on the European question, but the seeds that Teddy had sown had taken root and were to flourish in the thousands of Conservative activists who fought alongside members of other parties and none to win the 2016 referendum.

In CIB, we remember and honour Teddy for his Euroscepticism, but it should not be forgotten either that he was a superb constituency representative who operated virtually as an independent MP in his Southend East fiefdom. I well remember campaigning in a Southend awash with fluorescent yellow ‘Vote Teddy Taylor’ posters – Teddy had dumped the anodyne blue of the Conservative Party in favour of lurid campaigning

materials that were probably visible from space. No Tory candidate would get away with going 'off brand' like that today, and even in the 1980s this defiance of Central Office was exceptional. Yet it summed up Teddy's independence and his absolute conviction that he was there for his constituents first, and for the Conservative Party a sometimes poor second.

With Teddy's passing we say farewell to another of that small band of individuals of whom it can be said, without hyperbole, that without them there would be no Brexit. Teddy Taylor, patriot and comrade, you fought the fight from start to finish with honour, tenacity, and humour. We salute you and we thank you.