

Tribute to the Life of Sir Robin Williams Bt by Lord Stoddart of Swindon



I first met Robin in 1962 when we were both speaking at an Anti Common Market meeting in Woolhampton organised by Marie Endean. I was, at that time, the Labour candidate for the Newbury Constituency and I remember being very impressed but also very nervous at being on the same platform as a baronet with a formidable educational background and a Lloyds Underwriter. When he spoke it was clear that he was master of his subject and made an unanswerable case for Britain not joining the EEC (Common Market) and he made it in his usual direct, no nonsense, matter of fact manner.

The audience lapped it up and went away convinced that the EEC was not for us. Little did I know then that we would sharing many more platforms and fighting shoulder to shoulder against the burgeoning power of the European project.

Robin's contribution to the Eurorealist movement was massive and enduring and his belief that Britain was a great country that should be independent and self governing. He understood perfectly that joining the EEC would eventually mean the loss of British independence and self government.

He established and chaired the Anti Common Market League and was active in the National Referendum Campaign. He worked at national level with a wide circle of people including Enoch Powell, Peter Shore, Richard Body, Charles Frere-Smith , Ron Leighton, Charles Starkey and many others to support the parliamentarians opposing the European Communities Bill which only scraped through by eight votes after the Heath Government

had misrepresented the intentions of the Treaty of Rome and misled Parliament into believing that joining the EEC would not result in any loss of British Sovereignty.

Robin continued his opposition to joining and he was a leading light of the "NO" Campaign in the 1975 Referendum Campaign which resulted in a Yes vote after the then Labour Government fooled the voters into believing that they had secured significant concessions which, of course, they had not.

The "NO" campaign was opposed by the Government and Opposition, by big business, the press and media (including the BBC) was out-financed by at least 20-1, yet in spite of that pro Common Market onslaught, 33% of the electorate voted to come out. Robin's part in that unequal contest was a vital one and kept the flag of resistance flying.

And that was very important. Robin was convinced that the fight for independence should continue and that the issue of Britain's membership should be kept alive and his leadership of Get Britain Out and the Anti Common Market Campaign did just that. His determination to fight the forces dedicated to ever closer European Union has eventually borne fruit in that the demand for radical reform or complete withdrawal is now mainstream policy.

It needed courage and determination to continue and be among the leaders of the Eurosceptic movement, especially for Robin who mixed in circles, including the Conservative Party, which were committed to Europe and considered anyone who disagreed with them as dotty, left wing and economically and financially illiterate. But he ploughed on for years and it was in 1986 that I became closely associated with him when I became chairman of the Anti Common Market Campaign in 1986. The Campaign was then made up of a number of individuals and affiliates but this was to change dramatically and would pose a challenge to Robin who was its Hon. Secretary – a challenge which he accepted loyally but I rather think with some

trepidation.

The first big change was the opening of the Campaign to individual members with all that entailed financially and administratively, especially recruitment, collection of subscriptions, forming branches, arranging public meetings and an annual conference. Robin also had to deal with an elected national committee and all that entails – including criticism.

However, he, typically, did not flinch or rebel – he simply got on with the job and turned the Campaign into the leading Eurosceptic organisation of that time. There were further challenges to come. The name of the Campaign was changed to The Campaign for an Independent Britain and, again, the job of introducing the change fell to Robin and the name CIB persists today.

Robin's administrative and organising skills were remarkable and yet, along with his work for CIB and other eurosceptic organisations, managed to fit in with his family life, holding down a responsible job and enjoy some leisure. He certainly could not have done all this without the love and help of his wife, Wendy, who was a familiar figure at AGMs, running stalls and helping out in any other way necessary. Our sympathy and condolences go out to her and the family.

There is so much more that could be said about Robin's life and achievements but there is one famous occasion which is burned on my memory – the CIB international conference against the Maastricht Treaty (which set up the European Union) that he arranged in Edinburgh. It was a huge organisational task and the conference was a great success. However, shortly before conference was due to begin the Danish Hotel where the conference was due to take place cancelled the Booking. Just imagine the shock. Disaster loomed and the conference seemed doomed. However, Robin didn't panic he arranged alternative accommodation. The conference went on to its successful end and raised the profile of the eurosceptic movement in the UK and Europe. The Anti-Maastricht Alliance was launched as was

the European Anti-Maastricht Alliance which is still active today and meets regularly.

Robin was a decent man with exceptional organising and administrative abilities, self effacing yet effective. He was a patriot who believed in Britain who was prepared to give a large part of his life to restoring to Britain its independence, its democracy and its ability to govern itself through its own elected government through institutions established over the centuries. His courage, commitment and hard work contributed hugely to keeping the flame of freedom alive and before his death he was able to see that the ideals he had fought for were at last being accepted by the majority and his aims now capable of achievement. He will be sadly missed by all those who knew him.