

DO WE NEED THE EUROPEAN UNION?

(NATIONALLY OR LOCALLY)

Europhiles claim on every occasion that Britain would lose out on European trade were we to leave the EU, that we are in the EU because we are a trading nation and need access to the EU's single market and that this 'single market' allows people, services, workers and goods to move freely across Europe.

If this were true, how is it that Norway and Switzerland, for example, survives perfectly well outside the EU and are among the most prosperous nations in the whole of Europe? The answer is that these countries have access to the EU market but have few of the crippling costs or mass of rules and regulations that we in Britain suffer.

To begin with, we have saddled ourselves with two of the most appalling, costly and environmentally damaging policies, namely the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy – neither of which, for example, apply to Norway as a member of EFTA. These policies not only increase the cost of the British consumer's shopping basket (to pay for the EU farm subsidies, primarily on the continent), but they do great harm to the environment and also to third world economies, with already poor farmers there unable to trade equitably for their produce.

A further advantage Norway and Switzerland have is that, whilst Britain has had to put up with over one thousand new regulations imposed on us each year – and the cost of implementing these rules, EFTA's average is 300. In an article for Campaign for an Independent Britain, it is noted that the EU employs 20,000 bureaucrats whilst the whole of EFTA is run by an office of just 90 staff. Coupled with the huge advantages membership of EFTA would afford Britain, the cost would be well under half that of the EU.

Even more importantly, by withdrawing from the European Union, Britain would regain its full Parliamentary sovereignty which in turn would mean that Parliament would not be the 'talking shop' it has become, and laws would then be passed by democratically elected representatives. At present Parliament has little option but to push through EU laws, often disguised as 'made in Britain' when the truth is anything but!

It should also be remembered that, were Britain to leave the European Union, we would be under no obligation to sign up to any European arrangement – EFTA, or even its North American equivalent, NAFTA. We would even have the luxury of deciding our trading relationships with the rest of the world and it would also allow us to decide our own 'internal' system of democracy!

At present England as a country does not exist – according to the European Union - and is but a patchwork of artificially created regions, each with its own Government Regional Office (implementing 'national', or rather EU, policy in the regions) and another unelected, unaccountable quango called the Regional Development Agency (RDA) which has sweeping powers and a budget of hundreds of millions of pounds. These regional bodies work hand in glove with the European Commission and even have their own offices, or 'embassies', in Brussels! It is expected that RDAs will have complete control over planning and economic development which will include housing, transport and urban regeneration. But each encompasses a huge geographic area – far too large for a proper understanding of local issues.