

HOW TO SWALLOW CAMELS

(OR THE FALLACIES OF THE COMMON MARKETEERS)

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THERE are two popular delusions concerning the Common Market. The first is the idea that by joining the Market we should be working towards freer trade. The second is that we have a simple choice between stumbling along as we have for umpteen years, and joining the Market.

The six Common Market (EEC) countries concluded in 1957-58 the Treaty of Rome, by which they undertook eventually to remove the trade barriers between themselves, and to maintain common barriers towards the outside world. If Britain joins the EEC, we shall be required to sign the Treaty of Rome as it stands. Accommodating arrangements have been made, and are outlined in the Government's White Paper, but these are only transitional arrangements, there are no entrenched guarantees.

For historical reasons, the United Kingdom has an economy unique among the major nations of the world in that we have twice as many people as we can feed, and we have lived for over a hundred years by importing cheap food and other materials from abroad, and sending manufactured goods, and services, in exchange.

By contrast, the other economies of Western Europe have never relied so much on trade. In particular, they have fostered expensive and inefficient agricultures. In the past they did this because farmers were considered to make good soldiers. Now they do it because farmers are considered to make good voters. Hence the economies of Western Europe bear the burden of expensive food. It is interesting to ponder that even now the British housewife can buy food from New Zealand at a lower price than the French housewife pays for food produced in France. Nor is food the only basic commodity which is far dearer in the EEC than here; the same is also true, for example, of clothing. If we join the Common Market we shall be compelled to slam the door to cheap imports from outside the EEC and thus prove Mr. Rippon



correct when he said the days of cheap food were over.

The consumer would not be the only sufferer. Dearer food and clothing, and the obligation to impose tariffs on raw materials, would also raise production costs, and make it more difficult to sell our goods abroad. It is

most doubtful whether our manufacturers would on balance, even gain in the European market; it is pellucid that they would lose in the outside world.

The political prospects are at least as alarming. The instrument through which the EEC policy is effected, is the Commission of the EEC—a body of virtually irremovable civil servants. The Commission acts through the Council of Ministers, and its orders may be applied directly in the member-countries. Thus Parliamentary authority over a wide range of matters would be subordinated, not to a European democracy, but to a body of bureaucrats.

Even more disturbing is the famous Article 240 of the Treaty of Rome. As the White Paper has tried to gloss its meaning, it is well to quote the Treaty's own words:—

"The Treaty shall be concluded for an unlimited period."

Thus there is no provision for withdrawal, and we shall be binding all future generations if we join. We have no moral authority to do anything of the kind without being humanly certain that it is for their benefit. Who, even among the pro-Marketters, feels that sort of conviction?

It is important to realise where the real strength of the pro-Marketters lies. They imply—they never state—that the choice lies between the present economic doldrums, and the gigantic risk of joining the Common Market. Of course, it is nothing of the kind. *What is wrong with free trade?* And if it be retorted that free trade in the traditional sense is "not on" at present because the public is not familiar with the free trade arguments, then what is wrong with developing and greatly extending the wholly acceptable idea of the European Free Trade Area—EFTA? The EFTA countries are working towards reciprocal free trade, but have no obligation to maintain a common tariff policy towards outsiders. The EFTA idea, with encouragement and initiative, could be extended to include the Common Market countries, the Commonwealth, and a very wide range of other countries too. This would provide all the advantages which the Common Market is alleged to possess—notably, a large free market and "economies of scale"—without the tremendous burdens and dangers which we would certainly bear if we joined the EEC.

Will somebody please tell me one single advantage which we should derive from joining the EEC which we would not derive to an equal or greater extent from the safer and wiser idea of working on these lines?