The British press and European integration

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the author.


Additional Information:

- This is the accepted version of a chapter that was subsequently published by Oxford University Press in the book, Britain for and against Europe? British Politics and the question of European integration. It is available here with the kind permission of the editors. The book is available from: https://global.oup.com/academic/?lang=en&cc=gb

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/3195

Publisher: © Clarendon Press

Please cite the published version.
The British Press and European Integration - 1948 to 1996.

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Between 1948 and 1975, the British press moved from a vaguely 'pro-Community' consensus to a pronounced and nearly unanimous Euro-enthusiasm. Gradually this gave way to widespread Euroscepticism in large sections of the press in the 1990s.

The initial pro-Community stance of the press was not simply due to the influence of an economic or political elite on editorial policy, through media magnates or politicians. Nor do the international contacts of the media explain the professedly independent approach of the pro-Community press. Beneath their increasingly strident campaign in favour of EC membership, journalists and editors in much of the pro-Community media betrayed an underlying uncertainty over the benefits of committing the UK to European institutions and policies. 'Pro-Communityism' during this period often related as much to a desire for domestic political change as it did to a favourable outlook on developments in the rest of Western Europe. By taking a stand in favour of entry into Europe, the press was cutting a profile for itself in domestic politics. This meant that, not only did the focus of editors on domestic debate frequently relegate events elsewhere to a minor position in coverage of the issue, but also that the British media was often blind to what was really happening across the Channel.

Western Union and the creation of the European Movement, 1948

In 1948, the creation of the European Movement and the first speeches in favour of Western European unity of Ernest Bevin, Labour’s Foreign Secretary, prompted the first press debate over the merits of European co-operation. With the notable exceptions of Beaverbrook’s Daily Express, devoted to an empire-oriented foreign
policy, and the trade union-owned Daily Herald, chiefly concerned with the Labour government's economic freedom to act, most national newspapers and weekly magazines favoured the UK giving a lead in uniting Western Europe in the face of the Soviet threat.

Agreement stopped there. The Observer, edited by a federalist, David Astor, supported economic, political and military integration in Europe, largely in view of the potential threat of a German revanche. Its coverage of the founding congress of the European Movement at The Hague, stressed the federalist influence among British Labour delegates there and declared Winston Churchill's speech in support of a European Assembly his greatest ever. The News Chronicle, owned by a leading pro-Community activist, Lord Layton, was the only other publication which solidly supported the Hague initiative. Coverage in the centre-left Manchester Guardian was far less substantial, reflecting the editors' dislike for ambitious and 'divisive' federalist schemes and for the party political point-scoring which had accompanied Labour and Conservative proposals. The Financial Times largely ignored the political aspects of the European issue and gave scant attention to the economic aspects of the Western Union and Hague Congress proposals. The Times, though consistently anti-federalist, was otherwise unpredictable. Its editorials on 3 and 4 May praised Bevin for uniting parliamentarians behind a 'pragmatic' approach, 'organic, practical and developing always as needs require,' but were critical of Labour's 'isolationist' ban on its MPs attending the Hague Congress. Thereafter, its scorn for federalists was turned against supporters of the Congress, attacking preparations for the Congress as unpractical, though backing its declaration on human rights; Labour were now criticized for being both too federalist and too dogmatic to co-operate with non-socialists. A leader on 8 May welcomed the fact that Churchill's approach to a European assembly was 'vague', while coverage of Congress proceedings in the days which followed focused on criticism of its federalist elements.

However, the leading weekly journals began to treat the European issue regularly and in more depth than the dailies, paying less attention to the domestic politics which surrounded the Hague Congress or Western Union initiatives. Leaders in the New Statesman attacked the supranationalist plans of The Observer, stressing the need for British-led European unity in the face of US and Soviet
domination; arguing that economic unity, mixing trade liberalisation with economic planning, appeared more hopeful than political unity across the Roman Catholic-Socialist divide. The Economist, critical of federalism as utopian and cautious about European co-operation reversing American involvement in Europe, urged Bevin to be specific about what sacrifices of sovereignty he would make. The Hague Congress, according to an Economist editorial on 15 May, was 'unrepresentative', and had failed to address the main 'practical' questions: Germany's place in Europe and interstate co-operation. It nevertheless noted with interest that an assembly might become a 'European opposition'.

Though it is difficult to know what effect press support for European unification had on the UK government, a Foreign Office cabinet paper in November did take note of 'pressure' from 'sections of public opinion in this country' to make the proposals for 'Western Union' more concrete, and used this as a partial justification for increasing European co-operation (Public Records Office, 1948).

The Schuman declaration, May 1950.

Editorial reactions to the French initiative of 1950 to create a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) suggest that British journalists were now more open to a Continental initiative than they had been two years earlier. The Herald and Express remained implacably opposed to closer ties to the Continent, but most of the press welcomed the Schuman initiative, in spite of the difficulties which it presented for the UK. The Manchester Guardian noted that the Schuman Plan had 'exhilarating possibilities', suggesting that there were enough grounds for the UK to look 'fully and frankly' at membership despite the differences which marked it off from its Continental neighbours; The Times and the Daily Telegraph reached a similar conclusion. The Financial Times gave it little attention, but emphatically approved the decision to start integration without the Americans and British. The Observer, giving the initiative even less coverage, urged UK membership of the European organisation as a step towards an Atlantic Union. The Economist, favouring UK participation in order to bolster its ability to plan its own economy, maintained that the plan would 'stand or fall' on its
effects on links with the US, warning that Adenauer and other Europeans harboured 'neutralist' designs for the new Western European organisation. The New Statesman, declaring that Labour should lead a neutralist 'Third Force' Europe, balanced the risks of a 'reactionary' Western Union, dominated by cartels, with hopes for an independent Western Europe, bolstered by 'socialist safeguards'. The Schuman Plan, it believed, would dissipate pressure for a solution to the 'German problem' which left states sovereign and kept the possibility of German rearmament open. Coverage in the New Statesman was clearly influenced by Maurice Edelman, a Labour delegate to the Council of Europe Consultative Assembly; mirroring his positive judgement of Schuman's initiative, it asserted that Britain could not afford to reject the plan. Its position reversed once it became clear that Britain would not join. There was a broad correlation between the shift of opinion against the Schuman Plan in parliamentary debate and in the press (Moon, 1985, pp.107-115); both seem likely to have been influenced by the pre-election political atmosphere.

The Birth of the European Economic Community 1955-59.

The media took a considerable time to realise the significance of Britain's exclusion from the European Economic Community (EEC). Not until the collapse of the free trade area negotiations in 1958 did the bulk of press begin to question the wisdom of the UK government's European policy.

Broadsheet newspapers such as The Times and Telegraph played down the significance of the Messina conference in early June 1955, and the popular press ignored it entirely (Moon, 1985, pp.152-53). This reaction was in line with the consensus among diplomats and politicians from the Six and the US, believing a more supranationalist direction for Europe to have been thwarted, supposedly symbolised by the resignation of Jean Monnet President of the ECSC. Later that month, a visit from the Dutch foreign minister, Beyen, received mixed responses from the broadsheets: the Telegraph stressed the importance of Britain's role in the recently-modified Western European Union; the Financial Times noted that the apparent improvement in the Six's attitude to the UK was due to the knowledge that Britain had more to give than it would receive in
terms of the 'most important' aspect, the proposed European atomic energy agency, or 'Euratom'. A handful of radio broadcasts were also dedicated to British relations with the Six at this time.

In February 1956, The Economist took an isolated stand in favour of Euratom. Although negotiations among the Six were not covered in depth in the British press, the signing of the EEC and Euratom treaties on 25 March 1957 prompted editorials in the broadsheets, and the News Chronicle also printed a supplement for the occasion. Newspaper coverage of the development of the UK's counter-initiatives from this time was just as weak. A New York Times article on a possible British political initiative to the Six was missed in the British press, and they entirely passed over subsequent diplomatic developments in the winter of 1956-57. Broadsheet, radio and television coverage of the free trade area plan increased gradually over 1956-57, following the government's developing public position and giving little attention to growing backbench support for closer links with the Six.

By 1957 the tendency of the print media was to favour a European free trade area. The free trade area negotiations of 1957-58 and the establishment of the European Free Trade Association in 1959-60 provoked a greater level of news coverage on television and in the press. In the quality newspapers the issue still provoked infrequent comment, while the tabloids with fewer European correspondents relied greatly on the more specialist publications, for background comment. One such specialist journal, The Economist, had been increasingly critical of the British government's approach to the negotiations, and though their collapse in late 1958 left The Times simply indignant at 'France the Wrecker', a few journalists suggested that the UK should consider entering the EEC.

The first 'great debate' over entering the EEC, 1960-63

The British press launched its first serious debate over membership of the EEC in 1960. Until spring 1961, the increasingly pro-entry press was the main forum for public debate of the pros and cons of membership. Once the application was under way, television became a major medium for public debate over the issue, the coverage of news and discussion programmes being biased more towards entry than against it. By the autumn of 1962, the press was no longer the
largely pro-entry influence it had been at the time of the decision to open negotiations, and the government turned to television to persuade the public of the wisdom of entering the EEC (Wilkes, forthcoming).

The first publications to support entry in 1960 were those of the political centre ground which had already discussed the option in late 1958. Though their advocacy of the merits of entry remained qualified, they were less cautious about the need for change than pro-Conservative publications. Beaverbrook's papers, prompted by a government leak, began to attack the pro-entry case in mid-1960. By the summer of 1961, almost all of the press had taken sides, and the Mirror, its equally pro-entry sister paper the Herald (no longer linked to the trade unions) and the Express had launched 'campaigns' on the issue, stepping up the number of leader articles on Europe and regularly featuring polemical pieces, clearly distinguished from news items. The main news and discussion programmes on television - including Panorama, Tonight and Gallery - only began regular coverage of the issue late in the spring of 1961. Political balance in broadcasting was carefully monitored by the political parties, but not by pro- or anti-entry campaigning groups, and at this stage coverage was often biased towards the case for entry by the lack of news items clearly unfavourable to an application, and the relatively small number of journalists and politicians publicly opposed to an application.

To some extent, most pro-entry publications still took their cue from the government as it began its ambivalent shift towards membership of the EEC in 1960. In 1961, contacts between the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, the minister responsible for relations with the EEC, Edward Heath, and and the editors of Cecil King's papers, the Mirror and Herald, may have given encouragement to both parties in the pursuit of a clearer pro-entry position (Macmillan, 1973, p.14; Edelman, 1965, p.165). The decisions of much of the press to strike a pro-entry line and the launching of the Mirror and Herald 'campaigns' were also influenced by relations with pro-entry politicians. The pro-entry lobbies in the parties and the press had similar approaches: entry into Europe meant the revitalisation of the UK economy. Significantly supporters of entry in both the press and parliament based their approach on shared sources of information
on the issue, perhaps most influentially of all The Economist articles by Christopher Layton (Edwards, 1993, pp.923-4).
The role of the pro-entry press in the government's approach to negotiations for entry into the EEC has often been exaggerated. When the press were most solidly supportive, in mid-1961, the government was most cautious; when the press became less convinced, the government became more publicly enthusiastic. Increasingly, the Conservative government and party turned to television interviews and ministerial broadcasts in an attempt to attract popular support for its European policy, and plans were being developed for a more sustained public campaign in the event of a successful conclusion to negotiations. Macmillan made his first ministerial broadcast on the issue in January 1962, revealing the importance which he attached to it. (ministerial broadcasts were not normally used for single issues), and in September he made a broadcast which was so unequivocally supportive of entry that the Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, felt forced to contest it in similarly strong terms. In contrast with his diffident approach to informing parliament, Heath made a priority of giving television interviews during the negotiations. As the government became beset by political misfortune in mid-1962, the pro-entry bias of much of the Conservative press did not seem to be translating into loyal grass-roots support for the government. Macmillan made only the slightest attempt to 'woo' Beaverbrook, as he put it, knowing the personal attention Beaverbrook gave to anti-European coverage of the issue in the Express newspapers (Macmillan, 1973, p.33).

Gaitskell's relationship with the press in the summer of 1962 was more direct than Macmillan's. For instance, Alistair Hetherington, editor of The Guardian, consciously followed Gaitskell, rejecting the attempts of a number of Conservative ministers to persuade him to continue to support the application (Hetherington Papers). Having come down clearly against Macmillan's application, Gaitskell discussed the issue with Beaverbrook, though with little evident result (Beaverbrook Papers; Donnelly Papers).

In the summer of 1962, during the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and the party conferences, the Common Market application was the most frequently covered issue in press and broadcasting news. The early dominance of support for entry across the press and broadcasting spectrum had now waned, as objections to the terms agreed at Brussels appeared in The Observer and The Times.
as well as The Guardian. The Mirror and Herald, by contrast, remained forthright in their support for entry even after de Gaulle's veto in January 1963. The breakdown of negotiations, hailed by the Express with the headline 'Hallelujah!', was followed avidly by the 'serious' media in January, though the issue was already fading in the popular press. Soon afterwards the bulk of the media dropped the subject as they became absorbed in the implications of Gaitskell's death and the ensuing Labour leadership struggle.

The Labour government's Application

Though Wilson's government also made an EEC membership application, it maintained an uneasy relationship with the pro-entry Labour press throughout. The increasingly federalist Guardian and the Mirror had returned to pressing for entry while others, like the successor to the Herald, The Sun, tempered their support for joining the EEC with advocacy for Wilson's attempts at 'bridge-building' between the EEC and EFTA. In 1966, the generally pro-Community press opposed the tendency of the party leaders to play the European issue down in their election campaigning (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.214); The Guardian and Financial Times were so optimistic as to insist that the French now actually wanted the UK to join the EEC. Against them, the Daily Express, despite Lord Beaverbrook's death, almost alone continued to hold out a 'golden vision' of a greater Commonwealth association. Public opinion moved in favour of entry over 1964-66, though the role played by the pro-Community bias of the press in this is unclear (Butler & Stokes, 1969, pp.176-7 and 225-7). Wilson continued to skirmish with the Mirror and the other enthusiastic pro-entry publications, which for their part doubted the sincerity of his conversion to the pro-entry case. Privately he claimed to have been influenced towards the pro-entry case by an article in The Economist in 1966, though one close colleague, George Wigg, believed Wilson was more concerned with avoiding a Cabinet crisis than with the merits of entry into the EEC (Wigg, 1972, p.339; Kitzinger, 1973, p.226 and p.280).
Entry into the European Communities, 1970-73.

Media coverage of the debate over entering the EEC reached a new level of intensity in 1971 when it became clear that British membership was within reach. Again the debate was skewed: anti-Marketeers believed the increasing media bias in favour of the EEC was created by pressure from pro-Europeans and by the interests of certain newspaper proprietors. Uwe Kitzinger, a pro-Marketeer, has written of a natural tendency for journalists to support 'reasoned', 'internationalist' argument against sentimental 'nationalism' and 'simplistic' fears (Kitzinger, 1973, pp.70-2 and p.337ff). Both arguments have some validity, though the majority of journalists supported entry without pressure from outside, and their decisions were focused more on domestic politics than on developments within the EC itself.

Changes in the ownership of a number of publications underline the point that pro-Community bias was usually not simply a matter of directives sent down to journalists from above. For instance, there was no relaxation of the passion with which the Daily Mirror supported entry after it passed from King to Reed International, nor had The Sun become less pro-European. However, editorial policy in the Express did continue to be influenced more by its new proprietor, Sir Max Aitken, than most publications. The Express remained the main anti-European publication until the Commons voted for entry in October 1971, threatening to fight against a 'Yes' vote. But shortly afterwards Aitken wrote that the Express would accept the will of parliament a decision which meant that from now on the Express would fight for British interests within rather than against the EC (Express, 28 October to 4 November 1971; Kitzinger, 1973, p.345). The Spectator swung against an application in the autumn of 1970 under the influence both of its proprietor, Harry Creighton, and its editor, George Gale. Reacting to the signature of the Treaty of Accession in 1972, Gale declared The Spectator would reverse its policy again and become federalist - he left before the referendum campaign of 1975, however, and both The Spectator and his own programming on London Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) remained vigorously opposed to EEC membership (Kitzinger, 1973, p.342).
The influence of politicians on the national dailies was less obvious than it had been in 1960-63. The leading anti-Community weeklies, however, were clearly linked (through Richard Crossman of the New Statesman, Patrick Cosgrave of The Spectator and via the Tribune group) to backbench politics, and the sympathy of The Economist for Labour’s Marketeers may well have been increased by the personal contacts provided by John Harris (Kitzinger, 1973, p.337-39).

Despite the attempts of broadcasters and of much of the press to achieve a balance in their reporting, the pro-Community lobby gained some advantage through its organised approach to media liaison, based on the 'media breakfasts' directed by the Conservatives' former Director of Publicity, Geoffrey Tucker. Against this, anti-Marketeers paid little attention to media liaison. This made reporting of the pro-Community lobby easier, and the media breakfasts also prompted Independent Television News (ITN) (with a larger audience than any newspaper) to include regular information bulletins on various aspects of Britain’s application (Kitzinger, 1973, p.196ff and p,237; Hollingsworth, 1986, p.46). However, not all broadcasting coverage favoured the entry case: the rules stipulating that 'balance' be calculated strictly according to political tendency rather than size of support also had the effect of exaggerating the importance of the political extremes (Kitzinger, 1973, pp.70-2).

The 'pro-Community' bias of most of the press, both during the parliamentary debate of 1971 and the referendum debate of 1975, was partly tempered by the continued freedom given to the few firmly anti-Market journalists by many of the pro-Community newspapers (notably The Times, Financial Times, and Telegraph), and by their inclusion of occasional articles commissioned from anti-Marketeers, though in 1975 there were cases in which zealous editors on The Times and the Scotsman were accused of subverting both practices (Kitzinger, 1973, pp.337-9; Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.78; Hollingsworth, 1986, pp.46-9). Finally, the overwhelming domestic focus of the debate was as pronounced as it had been in 1960-63, that is, biased towards the 'pro-Community' case (Kitzinger, 1973, p.336).
The 1975 referendum.

In 1975, controversy over pro-Community bias in the press reached a climax. Not only was there a near-total dominance of editorial coverage for the pro-Community case, but news coverage also followed the pro-Community strategy in emphasising personality over policy differences. To anti-Marketeers, the newspapers' clear pro-Community bias seemed to explain the shift of public opinion polls from opposition to entry in 1974 and to the widespread acquiescence signalled by the 'Yes' vote in the referendum—though there are a number of other factors which might help to explain the shift (Hollingsworth, 1986, p.50; Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.176). Television broadcasting authorities, on the other hand, had largely quelled doubts about the balance of their output over the European issue, providing a large proportion of voters with a more reliable source of information from which to make their judgement.

A pro-Community bias dominated much news coverage on the issue in the press. Throughout the period of campaigning preceding the referendum, the 'pro-Community' press focused on the personalities of the few leading anti-Marketeers. The focus on personality had always affected coverage of the anti-Market camp more than the pro-Community camp, since a relatively small number of politicians dominated the anti-Market campaign, most of whom were prominent on the far left and right wings of their parties (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.194). Nevertheless, the focus on personality now went further than it had previously, various publications alleging that the purpose of the referendum had been to prevent Tony Benn from dividing the Labour Party. Assailed by the Mirror as the 'Minister of Fear' for his gloomy prediction of the effect EEC membership would have, Benn was also portrayed by Conservative dailies as a dictatorial leftist, or, as the Evening News colourfully put it, 'a vampire, a fanatic and a bully' (Hollingsworth, 1986, pp.47-50).

Editorial coverage of policy questions in the pro-Community press show that they were not simply camouflaging the case for entry in domestic politics, as anti-Marketeers suggested. Bemoaning the focus of the domestic political debate on jobs and food prices, broadsheets and tabloids alike insisted that EC membership was above all a political ideal, which most publications had supported for over a decade (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, pp.214, 218 and 229ff). The
press were generally critical of the government's decision to hold a referendum. So too were the rest of the pro-Community lobby, though - as Colin Seymour-Ure has noted - the press had its own reasons for opposing a referendum, naturally defensive of its political role as interpreter of popular opinion, and believing the European issue was too old and too complex for renewed public campaigning to be able to treat it satisfactorily (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.214).

Broadcasters too approached the referendum aware that they had to tread a fine line between boring audiences with too much coverage, on the one hand, and providing too little information on the other (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, p.190). The Government White Paper laying ground rules for the referendum established a consultative mechanism for ensuring balanced broadcasting coverage which increased the freedom of broadcasting authorities to determine their own approach. As a result, programming could balance the two sides of the debate with less need to balance the participation of partisans and parties in each item, and the result was generally approved by both pro- and anti-Marketeers (Butler & Kitzinger, 1976, pp.190-213).

Into the 1980s: the Debates over Integration.

Prior to 1983 the declared scepticism of the Labour Party reflected a wider public debate on European integration centred on the issue of whether Britain ought to remain in the EEC. The press, overwhelmingly supportive of the Conservatives, tended to reinforce Prime Minister Thatcher's belief in the economic benefits of membership. Whilst pro-government journalists like George Gale advocated withdrawal, they tended to be undermined by more mundane newspaper criticisms of EEC policy on UK budget contributions, agricultural subsidies and fishing agreements. If anything the complexity of the subject and perceived public disinterest combined to keep the issue off the top of the agenda, as did the coverage given to what were deemed to be more salient political topics like the supposed power of trades unions, Labour left-wingers and the Soviet threat.

The Single European Act of 1986 opened a new era of co-operation between Community partners. Following the largely
untroubled passage of the Act in each member state, integrationist thinkers came to the fore of public debate. President of the European Commission and the former French Socialist minister Jacques Delors articulated a vision of closer union and mutual co-operation. Others, particularly Margaret Thatcher, were less impressed. In her famous sceptical speech at Bruges in September 1988 Thatcher attacked the federalist position by arguing the Community should be nothing more than a partnership of trading states. The Conservative press, which backed the prime minister in other matters, tended to agree. Significantly they were joined by the Labour supporting Daily Mirror which sympathetically reported 'Thatcher scorns identikit Europe' (21 September 1988). However, as the debate began to intensify during the late 1980s into something altogether more important, it was interesting that the prime minister saw it necessary to question whether Brussels based correspondents were in danger of going 'native' (Morgan, 1995).

Ironically it was an attack by populist tabloid The Sun which brought Jacques Delors and his vision of Europe to greater public attention in Britain. Three weeks prior to the resignation of Thatcher, a move itself exacerbated by serious Conservative divisions over EC policy, the paper attacked Delors for being 'the most boring bureaucrat in Brussels' (The Sun 30 October 1990). Nevertheless, within a couple of days, the President was deemed sufficiently interesting to merit a frontpage story, which opened with the memorable headline 'Up Yours Delors!' and continued: 'The Sun today calls on its patriotic family of readers to tell the filthy French to FROG OFF!' before ending by asking the public to collectively shout across the English Channel: 'At midday tomorrow Sun readers are urged to tell the French fool where to stuff his ECU' (The Sun 1 November 1990). More detailed analysis in the same edition attacked French farmers' burning of British livestock, 'dodgy food' exports and even Napoleon Bonaparte. Less tastefully, The Sun also questioned the country's record during the Second World war. As Gertrude Hardt-Mautner points out this, the most infamous attack by a London based newspaper on an EC politician, is emblematic of a tendency on the part of the press to merge isolationist British pride with a fear that European integration threatens this in prejudiced reports attacking continental neighbours (Hardt-Mautner, 1995). Nor is this tendency solely the
domain of the popular tabloids, as a reporter on the Daily Telegraph showed when commenting on how a breakthrough in the building of the Channel Tunnel was enabling British people to smell 'the first whiffs of garlic' (31 October 1990).

Following the resignation of Margaret Thatcher from government in November 1990, the press not to mention Conservative leadership have appeared less predictable in their European policy. Warning of the problems inherent in the Maastricht Treaty, the Daily Telegraph was typical of much print media commentary when it urged John Major and his government to exercise leadership by 'strapping the visionaries into their seats...to check the extremists and put the EC on a sane and realistic path for the future' (9 December 1991). The press' initial, grudging acceptance of the complex Maastricht settlement was partially revised in the autumn of 1992, following the debacle over Britain's forced withdrawal from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. This event, popularly termed 'Black Wednesday', heightened sensitivities to the integration question and provided obvious support to the accusation that, as the leading tabloid put it: 'The European dream is in tatters' (The Sun, 21 September 1992). The following day an editorial in the same title declared it did not want to see a 'United States of Europe...run from Brussels' deciding policies on tax, immigration and the economy with recourse to a Central Bank (The Sun 22 September 1992). A survey of ten readers, together with the inevitable phone-in poll that followed, backed the paper's call for the government to 'Tear up the Treaty'. Reflecting print media divisions over party political matters, the press was not uniform in its response to the ERM crisis, and it was the Daily Mirror which defended the Community by arguing it had created 'ever closer unity in Europe' and been a force for stability and bulwark against war.

Euromythology.

Apart from the serious concerns that further European integration might cost jobs and cede sovereignty, one tabloid journalist admitted his professions' frame of reference was also governed by a view of an EC perceived to be 'interfering more and more in trivia' (Morgan, 1995). Most obviously this perspective has manifested itself in a series of so-called 'Euromyth' reports.
These arise because, as one correspondent put it, the 'British are overready to build on a little information'. Coupled with the large amount of material available from various sources within the Community there has been obvious scope for misunderstandings and inaccuracies. As The Sun (21 September 1994) put it, in one reknown 'Euromyth', 'Now They've Really Gone Bananas: Euro bosses ban "too bendy" ones and set up minimum shop size of 5 and a half inches'. Features of this kind, together with a mass of other press reports about the EC’s intention to outlaw anything from British prawn cocktail crisps to the pound, were judged sufficiently harmful to merit a formal rebuttal by the government in the form of two Foreign Office booklets.

The FCO pamphlets The European Community: Facts and Fairytales (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 1993) and Facts and Fairytales Revisited (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 1995) featured analysis of what were termed ‘euromyths’, ‘euroscares’ and ‘eurolunacies’. Interestingly the latter category, unlike the other two, did not support the sentiment that EU decisions and directives were always based on sound logic and common sense. By contrast the more avowedly pro-Union pamphlets issued by the Commission itself, Do you believe all you read in the newspapers? (European Commission, 1994) and Do you still believe all you read in the newspapers? (European Commission, 1995), were unanimous in attacking what they saw as unfair reporting in the British press. Perhaps surprisingly their list of offending titles included normally sympathetic journals The Guardian and The Independent alongside usual suspects like The Sun and Daily Star. It would be wrong, however, to portray all press criticism of the EU as essentially trivial or superficial in nature and content. In 1994, for instance, The Guardian challenged the Commission to make itself more accountable by allowing greater public access to documentary accounts of its procedures (Tumber, 1995).

According to one Brussels based journalist, the 'nationalistic' coverage apparent in much of the London based media derives from the fact that 'EU news still comes from British government sources' (Morgan, 1995). This is perhaps strange, given the existence of Foreign Office booklets aimed at countering press misrepresentations of Community matters. Arguably this reflects the
complex, ongoing debate over integration. Consequently whilst Downing Street has been keen to protect Britain’s trading partnership it is also conscious in asserting the national identity and independence of the country.

Given recent moves toward greater political and economic integration amongst Britain’s Community partners it is perhaps inevitable that the Westminster government, comfortable with the non-federal status quo, has emitted mixed messages which vary according to given policies or circumstances. Thus, where conflicts between London and Brussels have arisen, the eurosceptical press has unsurprisingly opted to follow the lead and promote the views of the former. This bias is further compounded by an organisational culture evident in highly centralised states like France and Britain where journalists can regularly rely on one or two authoritative ministerial or civil service sources. By comparison, what goes for an information policy amongst the diffuse body of interests that make-up the EU can alternate between the extremes of being, as one reporter described it, ‘naive’ or ‘Machiavellian’ (Morgan, 1995).

The fact that the media can help to inform public opinion and ultimately the different member states’ policies on integration has been recognised within Brussels. In particular the ongoing hostility of the British press and, perhaps more importantly, the initial rejection of Maastricht in the first Danish referendum on the Treaty [DATE] encouraged the Commission to reconsider how it might best promote the Union. Consequently reports from marketing and other publicity specialists have been the subject of recent discussions (Tumber, 1995). Accordingly EU officials are now taking greater care to service and monitor privately owned newspapers which, in a country with public service broadcasting like Britain, are often the source of the most flamboyant agenda-setting stories (Morgan, 1995). This fact, together with the residual hostility of much print media, was amply demonstrated during 1996 in a controversy over a hitherto minor public concern to do with the safety of British beef.

The ‘Beef War’ of 1996.
Ironically in its 1990 ‘Up Yours Delors!’ attack on the Commission President, The Sun cited a recent decision of the French government to ban imports of British beef as one of the factors motivating the paper’s strong editorial content. Few at the time would have predicted that, by mid-1996, this issue would be at the centre of media debates over government policy on Europe. The catalyst behind this development lay in a Department of Health statement issued by Secretary of State Stephen Dorrell in response to the appearance of a leaked memo in the Daily Mirror during the last week of March. Having made public their concern over the safety of British beef, the government appeared to give credibility to the idea that there might be a link between BSE, the so-called ‘mad cow disease’, and its human equivalent CJD. The move triggered a crisis of confidence in British beef, culminating in a controversial decision by European Union member states to ban all imports of British beef and its derivatives. As the British Medical Journal (30 March 1996) reported, the scientific complexities, public concerns and questions surrounding the wisdom of government agricultural and deregulation policies arising from the case, were soon sidelined in a media driven debate about European integration.

The Sun chose St. George's Day to offer its lengthiest response to the beef ban in the form of a frontpage editorial asking readers to act as 'EU THE JURY' (23 April 1996). The item attacked the Union as a 'beast...which aims to devour our national identity' and 'a very real dragon which threatens every single one of us throughout the United Kingdom.' Unusually for The Sun the editorial continued inside on a full page complete with an illustration of a dragon which had also appeared on the front cover. Declaring 'a thousand years of civilisation is being tossed away', the paper even alluded to George Orwell’s literary classic 1984 when it declared: 'We want to see free trade between friendly nations, a genuine Common Market, not an Orwellian superstate which blindly tries to make Germans like Britons, or Spaniards live like Irishmen.' Interestingly the piece made sympathetic mention of the Referendum Party led by businessman and MEP Sir James Goldsmith. Like Goldsmith's newly formed organisation, the paper and over 95 per cent of the 23,000 callers to a special Sun phone poll agreed that the government should organise a referendum on the desirability of further European integration.
Predictably the officially sanctioned 'Europe Day' triggered a hostile response from The Sun (9 May 1996). By comparison with the editorial of the 23rd April, argument was substituted with abuse in a feature, entitled 'WE ATE EU', which went on to attack corruption, sleaze and the notion that British government buildings ought to fly the Union flag. These points were further reinforced by television critic Garry Bushell in his attack on European federalism: 'Stuff your Union, Jacques'. Soundbites of assorted Eurosceptic MPs, all Conservative, were placed throughout the edition under the caption 'Why I Hate EU.' However it should be noted that the editorials in The Sun stopped considerably short of the call made by Lord Woodrow Wyatt in another News International title, The Times, for a complete British withdrawal from Europe (7 May 1996). Rather, like other sceptical leaders in the Telegraph, Express and Mail, the papers' commentaries tended to concentrate on the perceived loss of sovreignty rather than the issue of membership itself.

Arguably more of a revelation than editorials in The Sun were the equally passionate opinions articulated by the Daily Mirror. Declaring 'Britain needs EU', the paper developed its argument: 'If we ever cut ourselves loose from our partners across the Channel, we would become an isolated irrelevant island' (28 May 1996). In reality the actual policy position of the paper, if more favourable to the idea of a European single currency, differed from that of The Sun in its tone rather than substance. Indeed, professed Mirror enthusiasm for the European ideal did not prevent it from making what editor Piers Morgan later admitted was an error of judgement when his paper published the headline 'Achtung Surrender!' on hearing the England football team’s next Euro 96 semi-final opponents would be Germany (Daily Mirror 25 June 1996).

The debate over the media response to the beef ban created some odd alliances. Whilst Chancellor and enthusiastic European Kenneth Clarke must have welcomed the pro-EU coverage in the Labour supporting Daily Mirror, he was clearly less well disposed to those newspapers critical of the Union. Pointedly Clarke made explicit his view of the owners of what were once loyal Conservative titles when he admitted: ‘Quite a lot of the press is owned by anti-European people and they go to great lengths to try and and arouse
prejudice in their readers to match that of their own political opinions’ (BBC Radio 4, 31 May 1996). It is likely that, in making these comments, the Chancellor was venting his frustration at two well known non-European sceptics with extensive media interests: Rupert Murdoch, the Australian turned American owner of the News International Corporation, and the Canadian Conrad Black, proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, its Sunday sister paper and influential right-wing magazine *The Spectator*.

Predictably Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, went further than Kenneth Clarke in expressing his concern about what he called the ‘anti-European propaganda, and even xenophobic propaganda, in the British press’ (BBC Radio 4, 31 May 1996). Similar sentiments informed the observations of a London based German journalist Ulrich Schilling: *The Sun*, the *Mail* and *Express* are not harmless leaflets: they are read by 20 million people, and they may not all understand the special brand of humour which seasons *Sun* headlines’ (The Guardian 3 June 1996). The combined activities of the press and Referendum Party were enough to prompt pro-Union MPs such as Edwina Currie and Peter Mandelson to consider a response which eventually took the form of a public relations’ offensive co-ordinated by the European Movement’s director of communications David Vigar (The Guardian 1 June 1996).

Following their varied attacks on the decision of European member states to ban imports of British beef, the print media focus eventually moved to assess the performance and role of the domestic government. Particular attention was given to John Major. Following on from the broadly hostile comments made in normally loyal Conservative newspapers about the prime minister during the 1995 Conservative leadership campaign, *The Sun* once again questioned the premier’s judgement when it suggested he might be ‘raising the white flag’ in his dealings with Community partners. (23 April 1996) Major did eventually organise a government response to the beef ban which took the form of a general policy of non-cooperation with the EU. If this move upset member states, it did manage to temporarily appease many of the more sceptical papers including the *Daily Mail* which declared 'Major Goes to War at Last', and the *Daily Star*, whose headline announced 'Eff EU lot blasts Major’. For its part *The Sun* was fulsome in its praise for the strategy: 'Britain said No
to Europe yesterday- 12 times... Major must be strong. There must be no wavering. The people are behind him all the way on this one’ (29 May 1996).

From the beginning of the policy of non-cooperation, certain newspapers were less than praiseworthy about what they perceived to be an inadequate and potentially counter-productive government strategy for getting the beef ban lifted. Predictably analysis of this kind appeared in non-Tory titles like The Guardian, The Independent and Daily Mirror. Interestingly this line of argument was supported by the traditionally pro-Conservative Evening Standard and its editor Max Hastings. Within a month these critics of the government's 'beef war' appeared to be vindicated when papers such as The Sun, Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and Daily Express all expressed dissatisfaction with subsequent policy changes one of them denounced as amounting to little more than a 'cave in' (The Observer 23 June 1996).

The impatience and ill-will towards Major resurfaced again in The Sun following the resignation of junior minister David Heathcoat-Amory on the European issue. Declaring him a 'hero', an editorial supported the hitherto little known Conservative MP’s opposition to the single European currency by demanding 'Time you Major mind up' (The Sun 23 July 1996). Accusing the prime minister of 'dithering and fudging', the newspaper made plain the depth of its displeasure: 'Major's policy of appeasing Europe, staging phoney wars that inevitably lead to surrender, is exposed as a sham'. As former News International employee and Sunday Times editor Andrew Neil has since admitted, the opinions of The Sun tend to more accurately represent those of proprietor Rupert Murdoch than any of the other British newspapers he owns (Neil, 1996). Put more simply Murdoch and his tabloids are eurosceptics, disrespect John Major and appear to have a high opinion of Tony Blair. The European issue may have damaged more than just Conservative Party unity, it might also be in the process of breaking up what was once commonly termed the ‘Tory press’.

Conclusions.
The reversal of the trend towards Euro-enthusiasm in the British press developed gradually over the 1980s, affecting first the right-wing tabloids and then the Conservative broadsheets. This was not an automatic corollary of the shift to Thatcherite economics or trade policy, as The Times, Telegraph, and The Economist, for instance, having taken up the crusade against 'state interventionism' continued to support the EEC on economic and increasingly on monetary grounds. Nor was it simply a product of a 'populist' media reaction to the apparent growth in the gulf between the main parties and the electorate, a factor which previously appeared to bolster the pro-EEC shift among the centrist press. It was certainly not an automatic reaction to having discovered upon entry what the Community was like.

Behind the growing press attacks on the Community there lay a combination of all of these factors. Dramatic changes in Conservative and Labour positions over the UK’s role in Europe in the mid-1980s meant the right-wing press would now gain a domestic political premium from attacking the Community. The renewal of confidence among European federalists in the mid-1980s also gave the press more of a target to aim against. Added to this was the problem of the print media as a 'national' gatekeeper: 'The main problems for the EU is that, as Euro-scepticism grows, it is having to compete for publicity with national governments of Member States in a game still officiated by national media and particularly the national press. At the moment it is still the EU which is receiving most of the yellow cards' (Tumber, 1995). Finally, the 1980s heralded a revolution in the production, ownership and marketing of the British press. Competition, which had driven the press of the 1960s and 1970s into an increasingly enthusiastic 'pro-Community' campaign, fed the appetite of broadsheets and tabloids for sensational 'scoops' and anti-European populism in the 1990s.

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For example, Independent Television News and Panorama began to devote more attention to relations with the Six in 1957 (see ITN archives; and BBC Written Archives).

ii The Economist, Guardian and The Observer began to discuss joining the EEC, while economist and journalist Alan Day made the earliest broadcast appeals for entry on BBC radio, Dec. 1958 (Camps, 1964, p.287).

iii Those in favour of entry in 1960 included The Economist, The Observer, Mail, Spectator, Encounter, and Time & Tide. The Guardian maintained a positive outlook towards joining the EEC from January 1960, while insisting there was no hurry to decide.
Editorials in the Financial Times, The Times and the Telegraph also began to consider the merits of entry at this time. iv The continued balance of news items in the Express did contrast with the slant given to their headlines. Also in favour by June 1961: the Financial Times, Times, Telegraph, Guardian, Mirror, Herald, Scotsman, Statist, Sunday Times. Opposed: the Express newspapers (Daily and Sunday Express, Evening Standard), City Press, Daily Worker, Reynolds News, Sunday Citizen, New Statesman, Tribune, New Left Review. v Beaverbrook's personal interference in his papers' Common Market coverage is suggested by his correspondence with Peter Walker (Beaverbrook Papers) and from the testimony of Clive Jenkins (1990, p.130).