Chapter Nine
Maastricht and the Bastards

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'Some of the founding fathers of the Community,' said Mrs Thatcher in her Bruges speech, 'thought that the United States of America might be its model. But the whole history of America is quite different from Europe. People went there to escape from the intolerance and constraints of life in Europe.'

She was offering a historical narrative in which the United States and Britain stood firm as the bastions of freedom against the dictatorships of Europe, which might seem to be a fair description of the twentieth century. However, But the longer picture told a different story. The Declaration of Independence in 1776 severed the United States' imperial ties with Britain, not the Continent, and the first large-scale wave of immigrants came from Ireland in the 1840s, fleeing from famine and injustice in the United Kingdom.

Half-truths can be as misleading as fake facts, because they can sound more convincing. Despite breaking these ties, the US Constitution of 1788 retained many laws and customs that it had inherited from Britain, including *habeas corpus* and the right to bear arms, a law promulgated in 1689 to protect English Protestants from Continental Catholics. The refugees from Europe, according to Mrs Thatcher, 'sought liberty and opportunity; and their strong sense of purpose has, over two centuries, helped to create a new unity and pride in being American'. But this 'strong sense of purpose' applied less to the slaves brought over from Africa, who also built America, and the two centuries over which modern America developed its sense of identity included a civil war and the suppression of the Native Americans.

Perhaps the most misleading aspect of Mrs Thatcher's version of history, however, was the way in which she failed to acknowledge the interdependence of Europe and the United States, how they have influenced

each other over time, so that what we have come to mean by such ideas as 'liberty' and 'democracy' are an amalgam of the wisdom and experience of many countries. No one country, not even the Special Relationship, can claim authorship. 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' can claim its rightful place as well.

As the President of the Commission, Delors was instructed by the Council to bring together a new treaty of European Union, which would streamline the many amendments and additions to the Treaty of Rome that had been accepted over the previous 45 years. After years of negotiation, it was signed by twelve heads of state, which included six monarchs and six presidents, or their representatives, in the Dutch town of Maastricht in February 1992. The Maastricht Treaty, as it became known, was intended to provide the next stage in European integration but it carefully left the door open for new member states from the former Soviet Union to join, if they wanted to do so.

This was one of the many ways in which the Maastricht Treaty resembled the US Constitution, which was signed by thirteen member states but designed in such a way that it could admit other states, as they came into existence. But the applicants had to accept the same aims and principles as the original members and, to that extent, the US Constitution was not just constructing a new economic zone but laying the foundations for a new civilisation. The Maastricht Treaty had a similar purpose.

The US Constitution envisaged two forms of democratic control over the executive, the role fulfilled by the US President. These were the House of Representatives, directly elected through its member states, and the Senate, whose senators were appointed through the elected state governments. This system of checks and balances was reflected in the Treaties of Rome and Maastricht. There was a directly elected European Parliament, and a Council of Ministers, appointed through the elected national governments.

There was no European equivalent to match the powers of the US President. Some presidential powers lay in the hands of the rotating chairs of the Council, the President of the European Parliament and the heads of its Commission, but the title and role of a president was a more contentious issue, which Delors' Commission decided to postpone.

The US Constitution proposed a common citizenship, although the legal systems might vary from state to state, so did the Maastricht Treaty. The US Constitution sought a common defence policy and so (after time) did Maastricht. It demanded a common currency, the US dollar, whose value should be defended against foreign currencies, even though this might be to the economic disadvantage of some member states; Maastricht sought

something similar and offered the ecu, which became the euro, seeking a transition period for those countries that could not meet the criteria that the Eurozone required.

But the similarities between these two constitutional treaties, separated by more than two centuries, are most evident in their wider aims. The Preamble to the US Constitution states that: 'We, the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution.' The similar foreword to the Maastricht Treaty announced its intention to reach the next stage in European integration, and to seek an 'ever-closer union', bearing in mind 'the historic importance of the ending of the divisions in Europe'.

The Maastricht Treaty 'confirmed its attachment to the principles of democracy, liberty, the respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms and the rule of law'. It intended to 'deepen the solidarity between their peoples, while respecting their history, their cultures and their traditions'. It sought to achieve 'the strengthening and convergence of their economies' and 'to promote social progress for their peoples'. It reaffirmed the 'free movement of people' within the Community, while securing common borders. The two treaties might be expressed differently, they might have had different areas of concern, but unmistakeably they shared a common DNA. One evolved from the other.

Taken together, the US Constitution and the Maastricht Treaty, with their previous treaties, amendments and cautiously phrased *caveats*, provided the fullest expression of what was legally meant by 'freedom' in the 'free' West. Through the words that were chosen, the strands and sinews of their thought can be detected, together with the range of their authorities, from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman, St Augustine to Martin Luther King, Hegel to John Stuart Mill, each contributing a phantom presence within the Grand Hall of Signatories. Neither document is inward-looking or self-protective. Both looked outwards to recruit new members, but on terms that retained the vision in which they were conceived.

Nor were these ideals overprescriptive. Some were principles, like 'democracy', which were obligatory, but others were civic aims, like 'domestic tranquillity', which were not, and several were moral aspirations, like 'Justice', of which only God could be the judge. Where the Maastricht Treaty most differs from the spirit of the US Constitution was where it sought to accommodate the wishes of its member states. Where the American Founding Fathers were able to draw straight lines on the constitutional map,

like the roads in yet-to-be-built cities, Delors' Commission had to make allowance for the quirks of national systems, monarchies and republics together, in a confused Continent of once-great powers.

These explain the stress in the Maastricht Treaty on respecting the cultures and traditions of their member states, which was indispensable to secure agreement. No country, and certainly not Britain, was prepared to throw away its entire heritage to become a member. At the same time, no national narrative was free from deeds and blemishes that the country would rather forget. Should these be respected as well? Anti-Semitism, the Reign of Terror, the Spanish Inquisition? Or should the EU, in the spirit of common politeness, ignore the darker side of its national cultures and concentrate on the bright spots instead?

Throughout the Maastricht Treaty, Delors used the word 'culture' in a positive sense to mean values that had led to a more civilised way of life: its arts, its manners, its rituals of birth, marriage and death. But some cultures were bloodthirsty, some were xenophobic and many more were hierarchical, favouring one section of humanity over another, men over women, whites over blacks. They could not all be respected. Instead they needed to be 'deconstructed', to use a favourite word of the 1990s, analysed and unpacked, so that the corruptions of history could be exposed, and the half-truths of national narratives could be seen for what they were. But this was dangerous territory.

Delors had to placate those who, like Mrs Thatcher, felt that their national identity was under threat and so he pretended that all national cultures were good and should be respected, except when they were bad, in which case they should not be called 'culture'. If Monnet was right to think that his plan for a new Europe should have begun with 'culture', Delors painted over that starting point with a thick layer of diplomatic tact.

He also tried to detach 'culture' from the efficient workings of the market place, another near-impossibility, but one which had to be attempted, if free trade within the Community were to become more than a tempting dream. What people like and dislike, and what they want to buy or not, are closely connected with their national cultures. Trademarks and regional specialities needed to be respected and thus protected. But the rules that insisted that champagne should come from the Champagne district in France and Scotch whisky from Scotland should not be allowed, or so the Commission believed, to disrupt the founding principles of the EEC: the free movement of goods, capital, services and labour.

At the heart of these riddles, as it had been for the Founding Fathers, was the proposed currency. The physical manifestation of a currency, a coin or note, has no value. It derives its value as a symbol of exchange. To adopt a

common currency, whatever it was, sent out a signal to the rest of the world that the countries of Europe were working together for their common prosperity, the international exchange value of their currency being their joint concern. Within the EU, a common currency would prevent one country from gaining an unfair advantage over the others by manipulating its exchange rates.

Britain played its part in drafting the Maastricht Treaty. Delors was the longest serving President of the Commission, serving three terms, but there were representatives from the British government at each stage of the process. But their freedom to negotiate, however, was hampered by Mrs Thatcher herself, who had made up her mind that the Community was a threat to national sovereignty, and probably always would be.

In 1989, she dismissed her Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, one of her most loyal supporters, and his subsequent speech from the backbenches contributed to her downfall. From being the Iron Lady who could do no wrong, she was widely seen in her own party as being rigid, authoritarian and out of touch. Howe criticised Mrs Thatcher for undermining all the efforts to achieve economic and monetary union in Europe:

> We commit a serious error if we always think in terms of surrendering sovereignty and seek always to stand pat upon a given deal by proclaiming, as the Prime Minister did two weeks ago, that we have surrendered enough! . . . The European enterprise is not and should not be seen like that, as some kind of zero-sum game.

He deplored 'foghorn' diplomacy, shouting across at the other heads of state, and likened his task as her Foreign Secretary to being 'sent out to the crease as an opening batsman, only to find from the moment that the first balls are bowled that the bats have been broken by the team captain'.

Other stories emerged of her stubbornness. One of her ministers, Douglas Hurd, confided that only three topics were discussed in the Cabinet: parliamentary affairs, home affairs and xenophobia. Sir Patrick Wright, formerly the Head of the Diplomatic Service, spoke of her hatred of Germany. While other European leaders welcomed the fall of the Berlin Wall, Mrs Thatcher was hostile to the prospect of a reunited Germany; and wanted Gorbachev to keep Soviet troops in the former East Germany.

While she claimed credit, with Reagan, for rolling back the spread of socialism from Eastern Europe, she was less interested in offering an alternative system of government. This was another example of where a bottom-up philosophy differs from a top-down one. After World War II

and after the Second Iraq War, the pragmatic British were content with a poll of the people to mean democracy and a free-market economy to solve other ills. Many other issues had to be settled as well, preferably through a reasoned debate.

The Maastricht Treaty was finally signed in February 1992 by Douglas Hurd on behalf of Britain and the new Prime Minister, John Major, who succeeded Mrs Thatcher. She left behind a divided and hostile Party, one side of which shared her version of history, distrusted all things European and assumed that compromise was a sign of betrayal. The struggle to maintain a balance between the pro- and anti-Europe wings of the party dominated Major's time in office, led to thirteen years when the Conservative Party was out of office and returned to haunt another Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, some eighteen years later.

During the EU Referendum in 2016, her voice spoke from beyond the grave. She died in 2013. But for those in Britain who hoped that Maastricht would become, like the US Constitution, a testament to the moral strength of the Free World, the damage had already been done. To placate both wings of the Tory Party, Major's government had already adopted a half-in, half-out stance towards the European Union, within the Europe exchange rate mechanism but outside the Eurozone, not quite borderless, not quite integrated and not quite European.

'No, no, no!' insisted Mrs. Thatcher in the Commons in 1990, dismissing the common European currency as another step towards federalism. 'Up yours, Delors!' echoed the headline in *The Sun*, lending its support.

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Behind Mrs Thatcher's and Jacques Delors' two perspectives lay the foggy question of 'culture', and what was meant by 'culture'. She was an energetic Minister for Education in Edward Heath's administration, determined to raise standards in all state schools and to ensure that all students were well equipped to earn their livings in the market-places ahead. Delors was an educationalist as well as an economist, and chaired UNESCO's Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, which stressed the values of lifelong learning. His report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), provided the conceptual bases for Canada's *Composite Learning Index* and the *European Lifelong Learning Indicators*.

During the 1979 election campaign, Mrs Thatcher was asked whether 'monetarism' meant cutting back on the grants to the Arts Council. She dismissed the question as trivial. Her government was not interested in 'candle-end' economies, the tiny amounts given to support the arts through

the Office of Arts and Libraries within the Department of Education and Science. She had something more fundamental in mind, the transformation of the British economy.

But arts lobbyists complained that she was underrating the financial contribution of the 'arts-based' industries, in which the provision of grants through the Arts Council and the local authorities played a small but significant part. The British music industry was booming, fashion was swinging, publishing was thriving and, as a result, tourism and the advertising industries were doing very well. British theatre was an international attraction and West End restaurants were full to capacity for seven days a week.

In 1978, as the newly appointed arts and broadcasting spokesman for the Liberals, I expressed my surprise in a cross-party debate, that subsidies given to the car industry were considered to be investments, although usually they lost money, whereas grants given to the arts were treated as charity, although often they made money. What was the difference?

I had shocked phone calls from party headquarters. Of course, the car industry was more important to the economy than the arts. Had I forgotten the small suppliers? But some economists came to my rescue, including Professor John Pick, who conducted case studies on the annual impact of the Edinburgh International Festival upon the city's economy. These demonstrated that the arts could be a more profitable investment than the automobile industry, although not inevitably so. Certain socio-scientific distinctions needed to be made. Economists proposed two categories in the arts industries, 'cultural' and 'creative', of which one was profitable, but the other speculative. They were often confused, since they both employed artists, and even the British Council could not tell the difference between them. In the terrain of the arts, however, they were separated by a large spiritual and intellectual gulf.

In an age of monetarism, when every last penny of public money had to be justified in terms of its economic return, the idea that the arts too were an industry, and part of a wider field of commercial activity, was very appealing. It changed the way in which financial support was given to the arts. Commercial sponsorship was encouraged, so that the swinging heart of London could be supported by the firms who most benefited. When local authorities were rate-capped and not allowed to spend more than their authorised limits, sponsorship took their place. Under John Major, lottery funding was introduced and Britain's first 'ministry of culture' was established in 1994, the Department of National Heritage.

It was often asserted that Mrs Thatcher cut the state subsidies to the arts but she actually increased them. The money given through the Arts Council rose during her time in office but *how* this money was spent was

transformed. The spending was justified by indicators other than the merely artistic. At Stratford-upon-Avon, there was a thriving tourist industry, based upon Shakespeare. The Shakespearian heritage spread prosperity throughout the region. Stratford had its research centre, which attracted international scholars, its sites of special interest, such as Anne Hathaway's cottage, and its shops of Shakespeare memorabilia.

Against that background, the public funding of the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the finest in the world, made commercial common sense. It was a showplace for Britain, a prime example of a cultural industry. As modern Europe was under construction, there were many such places. The 'Cities of Culture' celebrated them all, with a European Committee to decide whose turn was next. In Paris 'les grands projets' of François Mitterrand were intended to build centres for the arts to celebrate French culture. It included the transformation of the Louvre and the modern music centre, IRCAM, at the Pompidou Centre, which was in itself a triumph of modernist architecture.

It was challenged in London by the development of the South Bank, with the presence of the new National Theatre, Tate Modern, a National Film Centre and the transformed Festival Hall with its three concert platforms. These large-scale and expensive schemes were not intended merely to attract tourists, but also to demonstrate the scale and provenance of a national culture, even its identity, and to provide what the advertising industry called a brand image. The economic benefits were sometimes more hard to measure. The 'cultural industries' could not be allowed to fail or to seem less than they were expected to be. National prestige was at stake. Critics had to be kept in line. Journalists were warned by their editors not to make facetious remarks about them.

In contrast, the 'creative' industries were by nature speculative. They were supposed to be breaking new ground. They might either strike gold or alluvial swamp. They could not guarantee success. 'Creativity' itself was a problem word. To what extent could human beings ever be considered 'creative', as a god might be creative or a technological wizard? What did 'creativity' mean? Was it more than inventiveness, so that one who discovered new sounds from synthesisers in a radiophonic workshop might be called 'creative'? Or did it have a socio-psychological import, so that novels by minorities were being creative, because they opposed the typical WASP's version of 'reality'?

Or was it a matter of training our senses, so that we looked at the world around us with a heightened appreciation? When I first saw a Ben Nicholson painting, a brown square upon a purple ground, I left the gallery to find a brick wall beautiful and intriguing, rich with colours that I had never noticed before. Or was 'creativity' a matter of philosophy? In our

daily lives, we notice what we are trained to see, through our education, childhood and social narratives. We are conditioned by our myths, but with the help of the arts, we can alter our assumptions, and transform the way in which we interpret the world. For literary critics, influenced by Structuralism, that was what creativity really meant.

There was an even broader definition, supported by centuries of religious thought, to the effect that we are surrounded by 'the Cloud of Unknowing'. The mystery of creation was and always would be beyond the reach of understanding. But through our senses, our imaginations and our capacity to reason, which were all gifts from God, we could appreciate aspects of the divine universe of which we were part. The creativity of the arts came from exploring that border country, where the known met the unknown, and we could sense the glory of God intuitively through what lay beyond our factual knowledge.

From that point of view, the 'creative' arts were more of a process of understanding than a collection of skills that produced marketable products. This was recognised by Delors, who, in his work for UNESCO, distinguished between four goals of education: learning to know, which included research and the discovery of facts; learning to do, how this knowledge could be applied; learning to be, how our minds and spiritual lives were transformed by what we were discovering; and learning to be with, the social implications of lifelong learning.

These were identical to the aims of the adult education institutes during the 1960s, where I taught, to those of the Open University and to those of the development of the regional repertory theatres, where 'Theatre in Education' was considered to be a necessary part of the activities. The rise of the reps was supported by the belief that there were many different local cultures in Britain, each of which should be given their chance to flourish. Reps were supposed to have their own small companies, drawn from local talents, with the means to encourage local playwrights and composers, and to offer fringe facilities for experiments in studio theatres.

During the 1960s, the arts were considered to be not so much of a product but a process. It was how we learnt to adjust our minds to the changing world around us – the threats and promises of its new technologies, its environmentalism and its classlessness. Some companies preferred to call themselves workshops or research centres rather than theatres, such as Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in Stratford East or Peter Brook's International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, his new home in the early 1970s.

But the 'creative' industries were much harder to finance than the 'cultural'. It was difficult to know in advance what the returns will be. No politician, no commercial sponsor, wants to be associated with a venture

that may flop. Like any other research department, some efforts might be wasted, although others might be triumphantly successful. The value of the activity did not lie in ticket sales, which might be small, but in how it influenced the minds of those who took part, both as artists and as audiences.

This might not be measurable. The creative industries did not fit in easily with a monetarist philosophy. During the financial crises of the 1970s, the motives for funding the arts started to change at a political level. Sponsors wanted to know precisely what they were receiving for their money. This was partly due to the arrival in the mid-1970s of the new National Theatre building. The NT had cost the taxpayer a great deal of money, far more than the original estimates. It was delayed in its completion and its Brutalist exterior, all concrete and wood patterned slabs, was likened in the press to a nuclear bunker. It had to be seen to be successful. Otherwise heads would roll.

The National Theatre Company had been housed in the nineteenth-century Old Vic theatre;, but it now occupied a much larger space with two main auditoria and a small adaptable stage, together with extensive foyer spaces for exhibitions and platform performances. The management had changed, Laurence Olivier giving way to Peter Hall, and it who was expected to turn the place into an instant success. To achieve this result, its funding was greatly increased, until it took about a third of the public spending devoted to the theatres throughout Britain.

The regional reps suffered in two ways. In some cases, their Arts Council support was frozen, or fell, while their best actors, directors and designers were lured to London with the promise of higher wages and international publicity. At the Old Vic, the NT Company had been a closely knit group, inspired by social-democratic ideals. This approach did not fit easily with the new management philosophy, which took Broadway and the West End as its model. Box office success was its main criterion. Hall described his NT as an 'industrial-commercial complex', which required top talents to be hired at competitive rates with the international stars of the transatlantic entertainment and media companies.

Hall himself, unlike Olivier, was not employed directly by the NT, but hired through an independent company, according to commercial practice. This enabled him to spread the tax burden, to accept other commissions and to gain the financial advantage of any transfers to Broadway, which included Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*. His exact salary was not published. At that time, I had been commissioned to write a history of the National Theatre,[i] taking over from the journalist and writer, Nicholas Tomalin, who had been killed on the Golan Heights on the frontier between Israel and Syria. Like him, I wanted to march to the sound of gunfire.

In common with other journalists, I wanted to know more about Hall's salary and the nature of his contract with the NT. I asked the chair of the NT's Board, Lord Rayne, and was told that this was highly confidential. I asked a former chairman of the Arts Council, Lord Goodman, the same question, making it clear that I was not concerned with the exact figure but whether the director of the NT was allowed to receive income from the commercial transfers of NT productions, as well as his salary as its artistic director.

Goodman took time to reply. 'I do hope that you will be a responsible journalist,' he said, 'because I should warn you that irresponsible journalists get a very bad reputation. I should know, because I am the Chairman of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association.'

With those words, a wider chill descended. In the interests of national prestige, the cultural industries would soon overwhelm and swamp the creative ones. The time might come when the process meant nothing at all, but only the profitability of the product.

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In September 1990, Mrs Thatcher resigned, having faced a challenge from the pro-Europe candidate, Michael Heseltine, which she won, but not by a sufficient margin to guarantee her survival. The split within the Conservative Party over Europe was an open chasm and would remain so for almost three decades. Each of its subsequent leaders – Major, Haig, Duncan Smith, Howard, Cameron and May – tried to stay in control of the party, whose members were at odds over this fundamental issue. A leader famously opposed to compromise left her party so divided that its future leaders were forced to compromise. They had no alternative.

When Heseltine's bid for leadership failed, John Major was chosen as the new leader of the Conservative Party and the *de facto* Prime Minister, who had the support of Mrs Thatcher but was not considered to be an anti-European. Labour had a substantial lead in the opinion polls but, when the next general election was called in 1992, Major won an unexpected victory. He had only a narrow majority in the Commons and throughout his period in office, he knew that the anti-Europe rebels within his own party could overthrow his government. His own cabinet represented a delicate balance between the pro-Europeans, led by Heseltine, Kenneth Clarke and Douglas Hurd, and the Eurosceptics, Peter Lilley, Michael Howard, John Redwood and Michael Portillo, whom he called (but not by name) in one unguarded television interview, 'the bastards'.

The Maastricht Treaty was signed in February 1992. Major called an election in April and in May the House of Commons had the opportunity to debate what had been agreed. The general election straddled the months during which, according to Major, 'the biggest transition to democracy in our Continent in its entire history'[ii] was taking place. The Conservative manifesto was bullish, fighting back at a resurgent Labour. It summarised the achievements of the Thatcher-led Tory governments since 1979 and announced several new proposals, among them a Citizens' Charter and Britain's first Ministry of Culture.

The Conservatives, according to its manifesto, had inherited a 'depressed and divided country', which it had transformed, and was now the centre for a thriving business culture. The City of London contributed more than £11 billion to the economy. It was at the heart of Europe and soon it would be Britain's turn to preside over the Council of Ministers. To appease the Eurosceptics, it listed the ways in which the government opted out of the Social Chapter and refused to commit itself to a single currency; and it steered a careful path between praising and criticising the Maastricht Treaty. The key principle, which Major claimed to have introduced, was that of 'subsidiarity', whereby no issue should be decided at a Community level that could be settled by the nation state.

But this did not go far enough for many Eurosceptics because, although the actual word 'federal' had been omitted from the document, it implied that there would be a level of government above that of the nation-state, and therefore federal by nature, if not by name. The significance was often revealed in the small print. The government would ensure 'that the renegotiation of the Common Fisheries Policy protects the interests of UK fishermen and retains their share of the Community's fishing opportunities'. For those who believed that the coastal waters were British anyway, this sounded like surrender to a superstate.

To appease the Eurosceptics, the manifesto presented the European Union always in a less than positive light. It failed to acknowledge that our membership was based upon treaties which our governments helped to frame and had signed on behalf of the United Kingdom. It seemed as if the Maastricht Treaty was a hostile plot against Britishness. To that extent, it was Thatcherite in tone, if not in content.

It was, as all the commentators agreed, a pivotal moment. The Cold War was over. The whole Continent was engaged in building a model for its future, which would take into account the global challenges of a nuclear age. Space travel was now feasible. Communication satellites had shrunk the physical divisions between nations across the world to the click of a button. Nevertheless, the political debate remained focussed upon

domestic issues. Either the politicians did not trust the public to speculate about world events or they were so divided that they could not venture an opinion without starting another quarrel.

Already the two world powers, armed with their weapons of mass destruction, were starting to look old-fashioned, as if from another generation. The Soviet Union had collapsed, while one of the two halves in the Special Relationship seemed uncertain of the way ahead, sentimental about its past, fretfully aggressive to those who disagreed with it and distrustful of foreigners who wanted to share in its prosperity. 1992 should have been the time to debate the future of the free world. Instead, the government's election campaign began with a death-defying compromise and ended with a squeak of self-satisfaction. We were still a sovereign nation but had opted out of a full commitment to the EU.

The smaller parties – the Liberal Democrats, Greens and National Front – complained about the political system. Under any form of proportional representation, it should have been possible to distinguish between those party candidates who were Eurosceptic and those who were not. Under the British 'first-past-the-post' system, this was difficult. The main political parties, Conservative and Labour were both divided, officially in favour of the Community but with strong dissenting minorities. To win, they had to pretend to be more united than they were.

There were alternatives. It was possible to argue that the trading agreements that held the Community together and put forward as the chief justification for our membership could have been reached by other means. Instead of trying to pile everything together into one Treaty, the social with the economic, the environment with industry, there could have been many separate treaties between independent countries. A proposal along these lines was put forward by a lecturer at the London School of Economics, Dr Alan Sked, who founded the Anti-Federalist League in 1991 and fought two elections under this banner.

He was a former Liberal, converted by Mrs Thatcher's speech in Bruges. He had studied the details of the Maastricht Treaty and decided that they were incompatible with national sovereignty. His new party was unsuccessful at the ballot box and part of the trouble, he concluded, lay in its name. 'Anti-Federalist' was too clumsy. 'Independence' was better, but a name like the 'British Independence Party' ran the risk of confusion with the British National Party (BNP), whose racism Sked abhorred. He and his supporters settled on a new name, the United Kingdom Independence Party – or UKIP.

Sked was its founding member and first chair. Under his leadership, UKIP joined the cluster of small parties at the bottom of the political pile, a respectable single-purpose pressure group with little chance of power. He

was joined by a former Conservative candidate, Nigel Farage, who wanted to broaden its appeal. As a supporter of Enoch Powell, Farage linked the party's anti-federalism with anti-immigration. Whereas Powell had immigration from the Caribbean and East Africa in mind, Farage expanded these warnings to include immigration from the continent of Europe as well and the 'free movement of labour'. In his view, sovereignty was not the only issue at stake but national identity as well.

In the 1994 European Parliament Election and the 1997 British General Election, UKIP did badly. It was outpolled by the Referendum Party, funded by the multimillionaire Sir James Goldsmith, and Sked himself was thought to be a poor campaigner, too cerebral, lacking in popular appeal. He was replaced by Michael Holmes, a dedicated anti-Europe campaigner. With the death of Goldsmith in 1997, the Referendum Party collapsed and many of its members joined UKIP. But UKIP was still a small party. In 1997, it fielded 197 candidates but received only 0.3 per cent of the national vote. In the 1999 European Parliament Election, which used proportional representation, the party did better, winning three seats. Farage gained one of them and entered the European Parliament as an MEP for South East England.

Gradually, the party's fortunes improved. In the 2001 General Election, it secured 1.5 per cent of the national vote, but no seats in parliament, and in the 2004 European Parliament Election, it did even better, gaining twelve seats and 16.1 per cent of the national vote in a low and apathetic poll. Holmes was a moderate leader. Although he wanted Britain to leave the Community, he was prepared to settle for reform, in which the European Parliament would be given greater powers over the Commission and the Council of Ministers. He wanted to extend democratic control over the Executive, which he considered to be largely self-appointed.

UKIP was never a party of reform, only of trenchant opposition. Election analysts studied its gradual rise in the polls and discovered that it appealed to blue-collar, middle-aged workers, white, nearing on the brink of retirement, a section of the population that was similarly attracted to the British National Party (BNP). Farage, who took over from Holmes as UKIP's national president in 2006, ruled out the prospect of a merger with the BNP. Like Sked, he feared that the outright racism of the BNP, and its reputation for violence, would deter those respectable Conservative and Labour supporters whom he hoped to attract. However, he held firm to the simple UKIP message. Foreign workers took British jobs, exploited the welfare system and depressed wages. They brought in foreign diseases, smuggled in drugs and terrorism, and despised British values. They did not play cricket, either physically or spiritually, and the prime source for this foreign meddling in our affairs was Brussels, the organ of the EU.

'The instinctive prejudices and wisdom of street politicians,' prophesied John Biffen, MP, in 1992, 'hold the key to Europe's future, not the great and the good.'[iii] Ten years later, he was starting to be proved right. UKIP outpolled the BNP in local and national elections, and attracted their old members, as well as many traditional Conservatives, who were alarmed by Major's apparent equivocation over Europe. When Major's government was defeated in 1997 by Tony Blair's New Labour, UKIP's support continued to rise, outperforming the BNP, which dwindled accordingly, and it became Britain's third largest party in the 2014 European Parliament Election, ahead of the Liberal Democrats, polling 27.5 per cent and sending 24 MEPs to the European Parliament.

Was this street wisdom 'instinctive' or 'acquired'? Was it the result of a natural human instinct to protect the family, the community or the race, from outside interference? Or were these prejudices derived from our British culture, the stories that we told each other, incidents that we remembered or wanted to forget? The rise of UKIP illustrated how a single issue of lesser importance could pick up other grievances, as it rolled like a stone downhill, until it became an avalanche mountain-slide of everything else that was wrong with our society.

UKIP was not just a political party. It was more of a mid-life crisis. Its manifestos could appear contradictory in that they offered ideas that were economically neo-liberal, in that UKIP favoured the free market and less interference from government, but socially conservative, in that the party knew what Britishness was really like and would summon up the full authority of the state to impose it. These, as Mrs Thatcher discovered, were incompatible aims and in both cases, when Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Farage left the political stage, their houses of cards collapsed . . .

. . . Or nearly collapsed, for even when their causes had been won or lost, and there no longer seemed to be a reason to prolong their campaigns, a residue of the struggle lingered on and polluted or, some might think, enriched the ground upon which it was fought. In UKIP's case, what started as a battle for national sovereignty became the war against immigration, and then an assertion of national identity, bringing the 'greatness' back to Great Britain. Any problem which could not be tackled at a national level and required cooperation with others, such a global warming, was ignored or disparaged. Nigel Lawson and others who campaigned for Brexit denied climate change as well. To be consistent, they had to do so.

If there was a weight of academic opinion against them, this had to be disparaged as elitism or 'airy-fairy' nonsense. Class entered the equation. Those who had not earned their livings in business or by the sweat of their brows were out of touch with real life. They came from the privileged

few who had been to university and so, naturally, their findings were biased toward the fortunate section of society from which they came. Any grievances, any feeling of failure, could be laid at the door of the Establishment, preferably in Brussels. So ingrained was the longing that dated back to Suez and the loss of the Empire that no honest supporter of UKIP could doubt that somewhere along the road we had been betrayed.

'You are a useless lot,' cried out Nigel Farage to the European Parliament. 'None of you has done an honest day's work in your life!' The man who sat beside him in the debating chamber scribbled a notice for the TV cameras. 'He is lying!'

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