**The 1975 and 2016 Referendums compared: courses and consequences**

The upcoming referendum on 23June represents a seminal point in the UK’s relations with her fellow Commonwealth members, as well as London’s international and continental relationships. The following is a summary of the meeting organised by Richard Bourne, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS) and the key points which emerged in the discussion of the comparisons with the 1975 referendum campaign and outcome, with the prospects for the 23 June vote and potential consequences.

The participants were **Professor Philip Murphy** (ICWS director); **Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind** (first elected as a Scottish Conservative and Unionist MP in 1974; former secretary of state for Scotland, defence and foreign secretary; former chairman, Intelligence and Security Committee); **John Palmer** (European editor for *The Guardian*, and then political director of the European Policy Centre, Brussels); **Dr Sue Onslow** (senior lecturer at ICWS); **Dr Robert Saunders** (lecturer in modern British history at Queen Mary, University of London, who is completing a book on the 1975 referendum with the working title ‘*Common Market or Bust! The Britain and Europe Referendum, 1975*’); **Dr Helen Parr** (senior lecturer, University of Keele); **William Keegan** (financial journalist and economic commentator of long standing, who was reporting for the *Financial Times* in 1975 and is now the fortnightly commentator for *The Observer*. A visiting professor at the Policy Institute at King’s College, he is the author of many books, most recently *Mr Osborne’s Economic Experiment: Austerity 1945-51 and 2010*); **Dr Piers Ludlow** (associate professor in the Department of International History, London School of Economics; author of *Roy Jenkins and the European commission presidency, 1976-1980: at the heart of Europe*); **Lindsay Aqui**, PhD student of history and politics at Queen Mary, and her thesis is provisionally titled ‘An Exceptional Case: Britain, Renegotiation, Referendum and the European Economic Community, January 1973-June 1975’); **Professor Sir Robert Worcester** (founder of MORI, now IPSOS-MORI; **Richard Bourne** (ICWS senior research fellow); and **Graham Avery**, now a senior member at St Antony’s College, Oxford, was part of the team that negotiated British accession to the EEC in 1969-72, and was private secretary to two ministers of agriculture, fisheries and food. He worked in the European Commission, Brussels, from 1973-2006 as a policy adviser in agricultural policy, foreign affairs and enlargement. His last post was as director for strategy, coordination and analysis in the Directorate General for External Relations.

**Summary**

The former foreign secretary, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who was also minister for Europe in Margaret Thatcher’s government in the 1980s, underlined the first important difference between the two referenda: in 1975, Britain had only very recently joined the EEC.

This meant the debates on ‘what will happen if we join’ were very fresh in the minds of politicians and the interested public. Whereas in today’s world, the great imponderable is ‘what will happen if we leave’ a treaty organisation which has handled many aspects of our national life at supranational level for the past 40 years – agriculture, trade policy, fisheries, etc.

Then, as now, there had been a process of renegotiation on the existing treaty of Rome terms; the party of government was riven by considerable divisions, with a substantial portion being led by a prominent Cabinet member, Roy Jenkins. Margaret Thatcher, the new leader of the opposition was a firm supporter of the ‘In’ campaign – and certainly campaigned more energetically than Jeremy Corbyn is doing at the moment.

[Photographs of Thatcher in her jersey with all 9 EEC national flags, and the YouTube footage of Thatcher sharing a platform with Edward Heath arguing for Britain to remain in Europe are ironic historical images of political theatre.]

The principal difference between 1975 and 2016 appears to be that the public now are much more divided, with major political figures campaigning actively to leave the EU. Forty years ago the great and the good were all on the side of Britain inside the EEC – business, the national press (with the sole exception of the *Morning Star* and *The Spectator*) – while the ‘Out’ campaign represented a motley collection of the Labour left, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the National Front, Enoch Powell and the Ulster Unionists. In 2016 the bulk of the Cabinet are campaigning for membership but prominent political figures are arguing ‘Out’. There is also division within the CBI, in the City, and particularly among small business.

The issues themselves are different between 1975 and 2016. Forty years ago farming and the cost of food, because of the Common Agricultural Policy, was very controversial – with the CAP being regarded as excessively extravagant.

Secondly, the Commonwealth was a very big issue then (although the long and hard fought negotiations around the Lome Convention had been settled in 1973, as well as phased tariff arrangements for New Zealand and Australian agricultural produce).

In contrast, the BREXIT campaign began by placing great emphasis on a so-called ‘Anglo-sphere’. But this nose-dived faced with President Obama’s trenchant statement, together with comments from other ‘old’ Commonwealth leaders – all of whom are anxious that Britain should stay inside the EU for geopolitical and global financial stability reasons.

Thirdly, the issue of sovereignty has greater prominence now, because of the evolution of the EEC into the EU.

Fourthly, there is the UK’s economic position. In 1975, we were generally regarded as ‘the sick man of Europe’. There had been two hard fought elections in 1974, and the memory of the miners’ strike, the three-day week, together with rising inflation and the impact of the quadruple oil price hike, was very fresh indeed. The situation is very different in 2016. While the British economy is achieving modest growth, this is still better than the EU as a whole, and the vast majority of her continental partners.

Fifthly, the size of the EEC/EU. In 1973, it constituted a mere nine members, while in 2016, the figure is now 28. The geographic expansion eastwards following the fall of the Berlin Wall to include not only a reunited Germany, but the Baltic states and members in South Eastern Europe has raised a significant ‘enlargement question’ and an associated potentially toxic ‘immigration’ issue.

**Change in Europe need not go just one way**

The expansion of the Common Market into the European Union of course was achieved by stages. Since the early 1990s it has been more overtly politically integrationist. But the original assumption of the founding fathers has not been fulfilled, towards supra-nationalism and an ever-closer union. We now have ‘Europe a la carte’, with different members in the Eurozone, the Schengen arrangements, while others are not involved in treaty defence arrangements. The arguments that this is a ‘2-speed Europe’ implies that we will all get to the same destination.

In Sir Malcolm’s mind, this is absurd, and he cannot conceive of Britain joining the Eurozone. Furthermore, ‘ever closer union’ has now been formally ruled out by Cameron’s early 2016 renegotiations. This does not preclude Britain from negotiating other arrangements in the future. But others may also argue for a formal status against ‘ever closer union’. This has set an important precedent which Sweden, or Hungary may well demand – and which cannot be refused. Immigration is at the heart of the current campaign. Similarly, given devolution and constitutional change in this country, the constituent parts of the UK are in a fundamentally different place now, compared to 1975.

Finally, change in Europe need not go in one way alone.

The political balance of forces in the current referendum is therefore very different from 40 years ago. Then the opponents of Britain’s continued membership were a small force comprising ultra-neo liberals, empire nostalgia and the Labour left which now favoured socialism as an inverted goal. Interestingly, it had been pro-Europe in the late 1940s, on the basis of international socialism which envisaged the European bloc as a neutral ‘Third Force’ in the politics of the Cold War.

The EEC was presented as ‘Rome rule’ by some sections, an echo of Ulster Unionist opposition on religious grounds, but recast as opposition to ‘capitalist/cartelist’ Europe. The pro-Commonwealth elements of the left, led by Peter Shore, the inheritor of the Douglas Jay and Hugh Gaitskell tradition, felt the UK risked ‘losing 1,000 years of British history.’ For these opponents of membership, there was little debate on where the EEC was designed to lead. Reference to the stated ‘ever closer union’ of the Treaty of Rome of 1957 was strangely absent. The predominant focus of the critics’ attack was the cost of living and higher prices associated with membership of the EEC. Other vociferous critics included the National Front, and League of Empire Loyalists, but both were fringe elements in British politics.

At the time, the opinion polls predicted a very small margin[[1]](#footnote-1) of victory for ‘In’ – in marked contrast to the actual outcome of the referendum which delivered a firm endorsement for staying in the EEC (67.5 per cent). At that time too, Britain’s industrial preeminence was in noticeably marked decline. Germany had forged ahead (ironically, in large part on the basis of the post-war reorganisation of its trade unions, on British advice); the newly reorganised industries of Northern Italy were increasingly strong competitors for British markets.

There had been a sense of rising panic of ‘we need to get in, and quickly’, which had mounted as the 1960s progressed. The political questions around what would the UK have to contribute in financial terms was certainly discussed in Whitehall. FCO and Treasury papers reveal that it was clear Britain was going to have to be a substantial contributor. However, the counter argument was firmly that this was ‘small change’ compared to the benefits of access to the Common Market.

Therefore, although this budgetary aspect was not publicly debated, it was certainly privately acknowledged among officials and their political masters. In 2016, the advantages of membership are still regarded as ‘net positive’ by British officialdom, but this has not managed to drown out the critics.

The process of Conservative disillusion and the party’s increasingly hesitant and hostile stance (among some sections of the party) evolved as the EEC/EU evolved. In the run up to Mrs Thatcher’s 1988 Bruges speech, there was a marked shift in the Conservative party to a more sceptical stance. The arrival of the Delors Commission was of profound importance in deepening this scepticism, with its emphasis on strengthening the EEC framework on workers and social rights. Prior to 1988, there had been a broad Tory acceptance of a more evolutionary process of integration, which altered as the European integration project itself accelerated.

**Turbulent waters ahead for the government and Conservative party**

The current division between big and small business needs explanation. As referred to above, heads of multi-national corporations have been firm in their declarations of the benefits of staying within the EU. It must be remembered for these global firms the EU is their home market, and their field of focus and activity is truly international. For small business (and approximately 85 per cent of British businesses have a work force of 10 or less), the EU is a foreign market, and there is resentment of regulations which are taken for granted as necessary by comparable small businesses on the continent.

Another paradox is rolling out. Federal Britain is accelerating, in the form of additional devolution of political and financial power to the constituent parts of the UK, and to the regions (particularly the north). It is entirely possible that this process of federalism will mean that the devolved power centres will demand changes in the revising chamber. This raises the prospect of renewed demands for reform of the House of Lords.

These constitutional developments in the UK are taking place while declared public opposition to accelerating federalism on the continent can be found in mainstream and tabloid press, as well as social media. One of the unremarked dangers of withdrawal from Europe also concerns Northern Ireland – indeed the possible enormous impact on the Northern Ireland peace process of ‘Leave’ is grossly underestimated. The Dublin government is acutely concerned over what renewed securitisation of the Eire/Northern Ireland border would mean for the peace process. There are other divides within Europe: on progress on banking regulation, whether the Eurozone area should set up a fiscal authority; as well as the destabilising spectre of the far right and populist movements.

Overall the progressive Toryism of the 1970s, which had a distinct position on Europe, was a positive force for British membership. In 2016, progressive Toryism is fuzzier and more fragile. Through its long history, however, Conservatism has not been an overwhelmingly ideological party (notwithstanding the Thatcher era). It has responded well to identified national need for social change, but, and crucially, it is primarily interested in power. This has given its policies and practices a pragmatism and an adaptability (as well as, in some people’s view, a ruthlessness in removing leaders who do not deliver power).

A fundamental question remains. How can the Tory party adjust to Europe? There are likely turbulent waters ahead for the Conservative party and government even if the referendum vote is to ‘remain’.

In Sir Malcolm’s view there were needed areas of changed emphasis. The European Parliament (EP) is still much under estimated in this country. There are fragile links between the EP and the British electorate, the overwhelming majority of whom could not name their MEP. Political parties here haven’t learnt that they need European parties. Sir Malcolm concluded that in the event of a ‘remain’ majority, Prime Minister Cameron must not be triumphant. He predicted an immediate major reshuffle and that prominent BREXIT supporters will be drawn in. The key issue will be which department they are given. Mrs Thatcher in the 1970s was careful to bring in her political critics, but to ensure that the economic portfolios were given to fellow radical Tories.

John Palmer said that in comparing the 1975 and 2016 referendums, it helped to put them into a longer term perspective. The first major moment in Britain's complex relationship with what became the European Union was London's rejection of an invitation to join the European Coal and Steel Community.

At that time British industrial economy was regarded as the strongest in Western Europe. Politicians of all sides were uninterested in any commitment to European integration - although some on the Labour left advocated a ‘United States of Europe’. By the late 1960s and certainly by the 1975 referendum, business and most politicians regarded membership of the (then) European Economic Communities as an urgent priority.

The anti-European right was relatively marginal and Labour was divided and included an important Euro-sceptic opposition to the EEC. In the new referendum, business is deeply divided between mainly pro-European British based multi-nationals, and badly divided small and medium sized enterprises some of whom support BREXIT. By 2016 the political balance of opinion on Europe had also changed dramatically.

Within the Conservative Party right wing Euro sceptics had become very influential, UKIP was winning a hearing both among Tory and some Labour voters. The Labour left has - ironically - swung to support of the EU and the goal of a more social, green and democratic Union. Whatever the result of this referendum, the scene appears set for a major political split within the Conservative party.

**The 2016 Referendum presented as a fork in the road**

Discussion then moved to more detailed consideration of the 1975 referendum, the first national plebiscite in the UK. Robert Saunders pointed out that in theory, a referendum was on a single issue – using direct democracy to diffuse a perceived toxic question. In reality, and perhaps inevitably, something else happens and debate widens into other contentious issues.

Immigration (described as *the* neuralgic issue) didn’t register in the 1975 vote, except in Northern Ireland where there was manifest concern about Catholic migration. Forty years ago, the press and television were the arena of battle, and this was a narrow field of media engagement compared to today’s world. In cartoons of the time, there are repeated images of ‘shipwreck’, with the British ship of state floundering while Europe offered safe haven for those who’d made it to the life boats. There were also insidious threats in parallel crises of power: the US in Vietnam, the revolution in Portugal, the violence in Ulster; and economic crisis, appeared to be unraveling.

Therefore with hindsight, there appears to be an almost apocalyptic feel to commentary on the referendum – with a grand narrative of collapse, not simply decline. In 2016, any repeated sense of existential crisis is missing (although more lurid announcements by fringe elements of the ‘Remain’ camp seem to present this as the inevitable consequence of ‘Leave’).

There is another political myth which has grown up since 1975: namely, that ‘sovereignty’ was not discussed in the first referendum campaign. The ‘right to rule ourselves’ and ‘power’ was certainly part of the debate, as was the economy and the direction of British voters backing the centre and the establishment as the poll drew nearer. In 1975, therefore, the referendum seemed to pose a decision point in a crisis. Now it is presented as a fork in the road, a choice.

Helen Parr commented that ‘going it alone’ has certainly changed in the current debate from before. In 1975 there was talk of Britain becoming a ‘global Sweden’, a neutral power which could, and should, concentrate on building socialism at home. Opponents of withdrawal made direct references to the War and the ongoing need to control nationalism to preserve peace. Therefore proximity to WWII for the older generation of British voters, for whom unbridled nationalism had been profoundly dangerous, was a very real political memory. Furthermore, in the context of the Cold War and the division of the world into ideological blocs, isolation was not seen as a viable option in the struggle against global communism.

Now the political alternatives to membership are transformed: given the ending of the Cold War, there is no longer any talk of aspiring to be ‘a global Sweden’. The Commonwealth is also not presented as a viable alternative grouping; and President Obama’s intervention has certainly made plain where the US sees its national interests.

In terms of political alternatives, there has been talk of ‘a greater Singapore’. While that might apply to the City of London, where this would leave the rest of the UK is unclear. Other suggestions are a reconfigured EFTA, along the lines of the EU’s relationship with Switzerland or Norway. Yet it is most unlikely that the Swiss/EU relationship as a model as it is not deemed to have ‘worked, and the Norwegian/EU framework has important costs, and regulatory and migration demands on the Oslo government and economy.

At the most extreme, the ‘Britain alone’ option also surfaces, on the basis of its heritage of being a great power. What is missing from the debate is the presentation of a really strong Britain in Europe. Membership is discussed in terms of pragmatism, in taking elements that suit British interests, rather than seeing the EU as a global power political platform for the UK. It must be said that in 1975, senior politicians overwhelmingly believed the alternatives to EEC membership were worse. Now that is not the case.

William Keegan emphasised the important phases and processes of British gradual adjustment to the European idea: from 1955, 1961, 1967 to 1970 and finally entry into the Treaty of Rome in 1973. By the time of final entry, British membership was a diversion from Britain’s real economic problems. Now the economic landscape is very different. There is serious debate on whether 2 per cent inflation is too low; the balance of payments situation is more serious, as the current account deficit is growing and Britain’s manufacturing base is much smaller. Furthermore, the chancellor, George Osborne’s declared ideological agenda is to shrink the state, and a free market approach to the level of the £. In both cases, though, in 1975 and in 2016, there has been huge risk in going for a referendum.

**Cameron has led the ‘Remain’ campaign from the front**

Prime Minister Harold Wilson admitted privately that he had a long term strategy of going to the country on Europe to get the Labour party in order. Cameron’s motivation has been similar: to cauterise the challenge of UKIP to the Conservative party. He forecast choppy economic waters ahead, and expressed considerable concern of the political ramifications of a narrow margin.

On the comparative renegotiated terms of integration, Wilson was felt to have played a better hand (undoubtedly in a more sympathetic media environment). Suspension of Cabinet solidarity was also judged to have worked better in 1975. Indeed, in the political battle between Jenkins and co, and the Labour left of Benn, Castle, Shore and Foot, Harold Wilson could stand above the fray and appear the arbiter. In sharp contrast, Cameron has led the Remain campaign from the front.

In his renegotiations and presenting them as a fundamental reconfiguration of Britain’s relationship with Europe, to some critics he risked comparison to Wilson’s reputation for political duplicity. Cameron’s highly prominent role and his political style means that personal wounds inflicted on his political opponents are all the more dangerous. Jeremy Corbyn’s impact on the Remain vote was judged to be underestimated – with a particularly positive impact on the student and youth vote.

Lindsay Aqui explored the information campaigns pursued by the Wilson and the Cameron governments in terms of their guiding policies, central arguments and portrayals in the media. Both campaigns have been justified by the argument that the government has a responsibility to inform the public. In 1975, Cabinet Office officials had evidence to suggest that three quarters of the British population needed more knowledge of the pros and cons of British membership if they were to feel they had voted responsibly.

In a Commons debate on 11 April David Liddington repeatedly drew attention to Cabinet Office statistics which suggest that 85 per cent of voters want more information about the EU. Yet, the pamphlet has become a source of controversy. Last month, Eurosceptic Cabinet ministers complained to the press that they were left in the dark about David Cameron’s plan to issue the leaflet and the *Telegraph* reported that it was signed off by a sub-committee rather than the full Cabinet. There were no similar complaints about a secret government decision to publish a pamphlet in 1975. This, no doubt, relates in part, to the fact that Wilson’s full Cabinet debated and agreed on the government’s information policy.

Wilson was not enthusiastic in his endorsement of his recommendation that the public vote in favour of remaining in the EEC. His lukewarm presentation of the renegotiation achievements, which he called a ‘substantial but incomplete achievement’, was arguably consistent with the stance he adopted in the debate.

Wilson identified as a ‘Commonwealth man’ at heart; however, as a pragmatist, he had weighed up the costs and benefits of the Community for Britain and decided in favour of maintaining membership. Cameron, on the other hand, has taken a more active position in advocating for a vote to remain in the EU. His defence of his renegotiation achievements was much more robust, claiming that he had ‘delivered’ on all his promises.

There are probably two reasons for this contrast. First, in the 1970s, during the campaign, it became increasingly clear that there was a minimal risk that the public would vote to leave the Community. Obviously, it is unlikely that the polls today could provide David Cameron with an equal measure of security. Secondly, in 1975, the ‘No’ campaign did not appear particularly troubling to the Wilson government. Cabinet Office analysis of trends in public opinion found that the more frequently controversial politicians such as Tony Benn and Enoch Powell received media coverage, the more public opinion swung in favour of maintaining membership. Further, only the communist *Morning Star* backed the ‘No’ campaign.

**Voters remain relatively ill-informed and unsure**

David Cameron has a much more hostile and a vast media environment in which to make his case and perhaps cannot afford to take the same laid-back approach that Wilson chose. It is probably fair to say that despite millions of pounds being poured into campaigns in the 1970s and today, voters remain relatively ill-informed and unsure about the decision they've now twice been asked to make.

The questions of renegotiation and its implications were explored further by Dr Piers Ludlow. In his view, renegotiation is a two-level game: firstly reflecting the nature of debates within the ruling party, and secondly, as a public relations exercise, which the government cannot afford to see go wrong. Britain was not in a strong moral or legal position about renegotiation in 2015, but there was firm recognition among other European leaders of the difficulties of the British government, and therefore a willingness to strike a political deal to help it out. It depended therefore on Cameron ‘pitching it right’. The way in which the request was calibrated was importantly different between 1975 and early 2016. Wilson’s initial request was worked out in opposition. He beat a careful strategic retreat when in power. In 2016, Cameron made an important strategic error: he raised false possibilities of the extent of British terms. Therefore, although both prime ministers had to scale back and jettison their demands, Cameron suffered the greater loss of prestige and political credibility.

There have been differences in process too, in terms of the personal diplomacy between European leaders at Council level. Given the institutional differences now, there have been different levels and involvement in outcomes, particularly the European Parliament. Both renegotiations fell short of the prime ministers’ declared earlier rhetoric and ambition, settling in 1975 for trade concessions and altered financial mechanisms of British budgetary contributions; compared to the 2016 opt out on ever closer union, and a brake on welfare payments.

It is arguable that Cameron got the better deal, but Wilson was certainly better able to spin what he achieved at home, in very large part because of a deferential British press. Also, our knowledge of Wilson’s achievements are coloured by subsequent awareness that the financial mechanism didn’t work (and the issue was reopened and hard fought by Mrs Thatcher between 1979 and 1984). Cameron achieved institutional semi-outsider status, rather than Wilson’s version of being an inner leader of Europe, within the EEC. Neither leader matched John Major’s deal in the Maastricht negotiations – undoubtedly because the whole of Europe was involved in the reform process in 1990-1, rather a single national attempt. Oddly, the renegotiated deal has not featured in the current referendum campaign.

Cameron’s decision to take the political lead on the Remain side (whereas Wilson could leave that role to the Euro-enthusiasts of Roy Jenkins and Edward Heath), comes at a higher political cost. Similarly, the negative tone of campaigning will have adverse political consequences in Brussels. Britain has expended a considerable amount of goodwill and social capital both in the renegotiations and in the subsequent referendum campaign. For example, European leaders have stayed remarkably silent when the ‘Hitler analogy’ was made and exploded across the British press – but such quiescence has a price. This combination of British ambivalence to Europe, even shown by the Remain campaign political leaders, and the institution of Britain’s second class status means it is unlikely that any future Britain will be appointed to a top job at the Commission. Therefore Roy Jenkins is likely to be the only Britain to be chosen as President. There are also aspects of European Union enlargement (widening the pool of possible choices) and British distance and disengagement from the European Parliament.

**EU is not of salience to the British people: immigration and the NHS are**

Sir Robert gave a highly detailed presentation of opinion poll data [see PowerPoint presentation] which, as he emphasised, amply demonstrated that the British electorate was changeable, ignorant and half-hearted on the issue of Europe. He underlined in both referenda campaigns that political chemistry between leading politicians, and politicians and public as well as ‘trust’ and the potency of imagery (seen in the satirical cartoons) are very important factors which must never be overlooked.

For example, Harold Wilson and his former political rival, James Callaghan visibly ‘burying the hatchet’. Therefore the subjective is as important as the objective. He emphasised the importance of not only working together, but also working out a clear and detailed strategy (in 1975, in the Cabinet Steering group). In his failure to do both, Cameron has shown a disastrous lack of historical knowledge and was purblind to the image of him going round European capitals as a suppliant, cap in hand. This highly public personal diplomacy by the British prime minister may also be a product of the increasingly presidential style of British government, a direct hangover from the Blair years.

That said, Cameron faces ‘multiple geometry in Europe in a way which did not confront Wilson: the proliferation of players, and the way in which the EU is now run. Sir Robert concluded that the European Union is not of salience to the British people: immigration and the NHS are. In all, approximately 5 per cent thought the EU was important, and the greater weighting of pro-European feeling is among 18-34-year-olds. However, the age vote is going to be key in the forthcoming referendum: there are twice as many voters among the over-65s, and they are twice as likely to vote.

The points arising in the final fourth session – Consequences: the impact of the vote in 1975, and potential impacts of the vote in 2016 (Graham Avery, Sue Onslow, Robert Saunders, John Palmer – Richard Bourne, Chair) were as follows:

* **The impact of the 1975 referendum**

A book published in the late 1970s suggested that the 1975 vote was one of the turning points in British history in the 20th century, along with decolonisation, Suez etc, but a few years later this hardly rated. The vote bringing the UK in was part of the first big expansion (with Denmark and Ireland) and gave EEC confidence to expand. In the late 1970s there was a brief moment, associated with Roy Jenkins as Commission president and the UK chairing the Council of Ministers (an institution which was only formalised after the 1975 accessions) when it did seem that the UK could be at the heart of the EEC. This dribbled away in the 1980s as Mrs Thatcher wanted her billion back. In domestic politics, the 1975 victory helped consolidate Mrs Thatcher’s leadership of the Conservative Party, the cross-party alliances and the slow post-referendum move of the Labour Party to a more pro-European position led to the SDP.

* **In terms of the possible consequences of the 2016 referendum**

If Remain wins, it will confirm the UK as a second-class citizen in the EU, a position which would have horrified leaders in the 1970s (no Euro, no Schengen, no ever-closer union). If Remain wins, the Brexiters will complain of a stitch-up and betrayal and as elsewhere it will lead to a ‘never-endum’, especially as the recent European Union Act requires a referendum if there is any treaty change proposed. The UK will be in a strange position, so that any new changes will bring the threat of an exit, instead of a calmer negotiation. Thirdly, if Remain wins there is still likely to be a challenge to David Cameron. Fifty Tory MPs are determined to run one, with another 100 standing by. Fourthly, if Remain wins, it will strengthen the EU, but the UK will have exhausted its credit for a while. The panel disagreed as to whether it would damage the prospect of British working in the EU. Britain would be well advised to consider reform:

1. instituting proper and effective Parliamentary select committee oversight of EU political and financial aspects
2. engaging actively with party political blocs in the European Parliament to correct the so-called democratic deficit

In contrast, if Leave wins, it will take two years to negotiate extraction (under Article 50), but another eight years to deal with other consequential matters. Secondly, if Leave wins, Cameron will go at once. Thirdly, if Leave wins, there will be instant ramifications in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

1. **NB**: Sir Robert Worcester later clarified the memory slip of Sir Malcolm Rifkind, about the 'very small margin', which is very factually incorrect. It was the Gallup Poll published on 24 January 1975 which showed a large lead for *getting out* of the EEC, 57 per cent to 43 per cent. And from the call of the Referendum straight through to the Referendum day itself, the polls were constantly steady from March through June at between 66 and 70 to stay in. The result was indeed, both on the eve of poll and on the results of the ballots themselves, 67 per cent/33 per cent (59 per cent/41 per cent in Scotland). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)