

Toby Wardman

Writing sample

Articles in the Guardian

8 June 2004

No one can fail to have been moved by the D-day ceremonies in Normandy. My own father was parachuted into France on June 6, 1944, and was captured by the Germans a few days later. Now, aged 84, he's back in Normandy, joining with thousands of others to commemorate the 60th anniversary of this turning-point in European history.

The liberation of Europe that ended the second world war also heralded a fundamental change in the European political landscape. Today, for the first time in the history of the world, a continent that was perpetually ravaged by war has become a beacon of peace, solidarity and democracy.

In today's Europe, the legacy of the soldiers who gave their lives to defeat fascism is still tangible. We see it not only in the moving tributes watched by the world this weekend, but in the very existence of the day-to-day cooperative framework to which 25 countries have now subscribed.

When you put the history of our continent in perspective, it really beggars belief that there are still people out there who genuinely think that "we need to disengage from the *acquis communautaire* across a broad front; we need to repeal the 1972 European Communities Act and the European convention on human rights" [note: this is a reference to a preceding article]. There really are people who think that the best thing for Europe would be for us to rip apart everything we've been building for the past 60 years, retreat into isolationism, close our eyes tight shut, and pretend that somehow Britain can become "independent" again - in other words, to try and resurrect a 19th century worldview in a 21st century reality.

What's even more astonishing is that this is the attitude not of some maverick fringe politician, but of one of the Conservative party's lead candidates in Thursday's elections! Roger Helmer's column yesterday is so full of confusions, myths and non sequiturs that I don't really know where to begin in response.

Or perhaps it's best not to. After all, even Michael Howard has denounced this kind of extreme Euroscepticism as unworkable. Besides, the sight of Tories squabbling among themselves over Europe is hardly a new one.

Let's leave them to their internal feuds. And meanwhile, let's get on with the real job - working together to build a more peaceful, more constructive and more democratic Europe. A Europe for all its citizens. A Europe that those who gave their lives for peace in 1944 would have been proud of.

1 June 2004

For once, I agree with Roger Helmer MEP, which is rather disconcerting. Jeffrey Titford's Europhobic bluster is indeed as vacuous as we've all come to expect from the UK Independence party.

What actually is the point of having a UKIP MEP? We know their voting record is abysmal, as Roger points out. So do they, perhaps, help in holding the EU's executive to account - a responsibility you'd think rabid anti-Europeans would relish? No. UKIP's three MEPs managed to ask a grand total of one question between them at parliamentary question time - in the past five years! (By comparison, Labour have asked 329 and the Tories managed 131.)

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On top of that, two of the three UKIP members have managed zero written questions to the commission, compared to Labour's 1089. And between them all they've written (wait for it) zero reports in committee, compared to Labour's 77.

You've got to feel sorry for the constituents who thought they might actually be getting representatives when they voted for UKIP in 1999!

That said, I hope Roger realises what he's signing up to when he agrees with UKIP's "good line in patter". This is a group that responded to recent letter-bomb attacks by saying it "understood" why terrorists might attack MEPs, then repeatedly refused to withdraw its remarks. This is a group which elected a known BNP activist to chair their Vale of York branch, and then expelled him just as it was about to be exposed. This is a group whose Eastern region MEP, Jeffrey Titford himself, used to be a member of the far-right New Britain party.

BNP and UKIP benefit from the same xenophobic fringe vote, of course - and they're taking advantage of it. I've looked at the stats. In West Yorkshire, my area's local elections, BNP and UKIP are putting up a total of 82 candidates - yet there's only one single ward (out of 125) where they're willing to stand against each other! If that's not evidence that the two parties came from the same gutter, I don't know what is.

So I have nothing more to say to Mr Titford, except to point out that I've been campaigning against rightwing extremism for most of my life. And I won't be stopping now.