

DT008 - A European federation?

In Dublin Mrs Thatcher asked whether European political unification would prejudice the continued existence of the United Kingdom Parliament, with its 700 years of history. The answer may be found by examining that history. In 1707 the Parliament of Great Britain was formed by the union of what the English jurist Blackstone called 'two distinct and independent parliaments', namely those of England and Scotland. A century later the Parliament of the United Kingdom was formed by a similar process. The Union with Ireland Act 1800 declared that on 1 January 1801 'and for ever after' the kingdom of Great Britain and the kingdom of Ireland were to be united into one kingdom by the name of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The ancient Parliament of Ireland thereupon ceased to exist, being absorbed in that at Westminster. Later, as we know, the south of Ireland removed itself from the union.

It is perhaps appropriate that in Dublin of all places a late twentieth-century continuation of this enlarging and unifying process should be adumbrated. It appears irresistible that the next historic step will be a union of the existing territories and legislatures of the Twelve. This may be deferred for a time by British procrastination, but it cannot be deferred for ever. Europe has already spawned a number of great unions of territories, of which the United States is the chief. With the coming reunification of Germany, many will think it is high time Europe itself was unified at a federal level. We should want our country to lead in this exciting development, rather than dragging its feet. That way we have a greater chance of seeing our democratic practices and traditions, which Mrs Thatcher rightly cherishes, embodied in the greater European Parliament which will be the successor to our present legislature.

Mrs Thatcher asks what will become of the Queen. Mr Heath says that is a red herring, and Her Majesty's role will be unaltered. I am sure Mr Heath is wrong. The role of the Governor of Virginia was not unaltered when the United States was formed. Again we have an opportunity here. The House of Windsor has historic connections with several European countries, Germany in particular. If we play a leading, rather than a lagging, part in working out the new arrangements there is no reason why Europe should not emerge as a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as its head.