

Edward Heath: Stepping From the Shadows

by Katharine Kanter

On July 17, 2005, there died Sir Edward Heath, former Prime Minister of Great Britain. Very detailed necrologies have appeared in all the world's press.

Allow us therefore to focus solely on a singular aspect that might perhaps be overlooked.

It can now be said that Edward Heath was amongst those Europeans who intervened with the prison and judicial authorities of the United States, in an attempt to secure the release of Lyndon LaRouche, who was in jail, a political prisoner, from 1989 to 1994.

Mr. LaRouche could not be described as a warm admirer of the British Empire nor of the Monarchy. His philosophical disagreements with the ruling classes of Great Britain are more severe still than his critique of their system of political economy.

Sir Edward, throughout his life, remained a pillar of the Conservative Party, and would seem to be the quintessential Establishment figure.

How then, did Sir Edward take an interest in the LaRouche case—let alone actively intervene?



*Edward Heath
(1916-2005)*

Humble Beginnings

In the *Telegraph* on July 18, appeared a necrology, doubtless penned by one of the smaller braying equids from Maggie Thatcher's stable, that gives some clues. It refers to the late statesman's support for the supersonic Concorde and the Channel Tunnel (in the 1970s) as "large-scale vanity projects," and spares few epithets, "charmless" and "graceless" being amongst the more flattering.

The giveaway is the *Telegraph's* unconcealed distaste for Heath's "kind of Conservatism [that] appealed to his instincts far more than did the prescriptions of the market-place— . . . corporatist rather than political, dirigist rather than democratic."

Sir Edward's father was a carpenter, and his mother, a lady's maid. Today, in 2005, thanks to the Thatcherite stranglehold over the European economy, that would mean living out a "nasty, brutish and short" existence with no hope of advancement whatsoever.

In 1916, however, and despite the War, the idea of progress was not quite dead in England.

Although his parents were, if not penniless, very poor, they bought Edward a piano, and his brother a violin, although it took years to finish paying for them. Edward went to a Church of England primary school, where great emphasis was placed on serious musical training. On scholarship, he was then sent to Chatham House Grammar School, at Ramsgate, where he received a very good education. All the while, he sang at Saint Peter's parish church—great music, in fact—and joined a group of youngsters at Broadstairs that sang, to a very high level, for charity. It was called Our Carol Party,

"We had some German carols and some French carols; we always tried to use obscure harmonizations of the better-known tunes, and we sang lesser-known English songs collected from the countryside. Everything was performed *a cappella*, and with great control and discipline."

Heath later took over leadership of the Group, and made friends of whom he always retained "vivid memories of singing madrigals . . . around the dining table."

At Chatham House Grammar School, Edward acted in Shakespeare's plays, "where I learnt some important political lessons" (later, at Oxford, he was to tour the countryside with a group performing ancient Greek plays, to which he had composed the music), was taught to play the organ to a professional standard, studied music theory, and conducted the school orchestra, several of whose members later become outstanding musicians. One should stress here that this was *not* one of the country's top public (i.e., private) schools, but simply a Grammar School.

In March 1933, the Oxford Union debating society had considered the motion that "This House will under no circumstances fight for King and Country," carried by 275 votes to 153, an event reported to Berlin by the German Ambassador at London as a signal that England was unlikely to fight. The Oxford Debating Union, founded in 1823, was, and to a lesser extent remains, a prestigious and influential factor in national politics.

Nevertheless, from Chatham House Grammar School, at his School's newly founded Debating Society, the 17-year-old Edward spoke out against that policy of appeasement, and won the debate by 45 votes to 13.

For a working-class nobody of 17 who was conservatively inclined and already politically ambitious, to speak out so publicly against the prevailing upper-class view, was the mark of an independent and principled mind.

In Sir Edward's words, "I suppose that I was already in-

curably addicted to politics by my teenage years. Young people have always been unwilling to accept the world as they find it. . . . I have always believed that anyone who wants to see a better world—with greater prosperity for all, fewer injustices and more opportunities—cannot afford to sit around being an armchair critic. If you want something done, then you have to be a doer, and I resolved, early on, to be a doer."

Edward went up to Balliol, where he read PPE (Philosophy, Politics, Economics), and, though he eventually decided against a professional musical career, gained an organ scholarship at the hands of Ernest Walker, who had known Brahms personally. That scholarship afforded him a living. He joined the Oxford Bach Choir, and writes,

"The overwhelming impact on me was made by Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, which we sang in Oxford Town Hall. One of Beethoven's greatest works, it has played its part at intervals throughout my life . . . devotional music of this calibre often gives me the most intense joy of all. Perhaps this is because, in common with many of my contemporaries in this country, I first experienced great music through performing it in the English choral tradition. Nothing can get you inside a work, and the mind of its composer, quite like studying and then performing it."

Opposition to Nazis and Thatcherites

At Oxford in 1938, having returned from several months in Germany where he was an eyewitness to the Nuremberg Rally, Edward rose again to attack the policy of appeasement in debate. In 1939, he became president of the Oxford Union.

To give one the flavor of what Edward and his friends were up against, this is a diary entry from the ultra-right Conservative, Henry Channon, dated Dec. 5, 1936:

"I had a long conversation with Lord Halifax [then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's War Secretary] about Germany and his recent visit. He described Hitler's appearance, his khaki shirt, black breeches and patent leather evening shoes. He told me he liked all the Nazi leaders, even Goebbels, and he was much impressed, interested, and amused by the visit. He thinks the regime absolutely fantastic, perhaps even too fantastic to be taken seriously. But he is very glad that he went, and thinks good may come of it. I was riveted by all he said, and reluctant to let him go."

Sir Edward, who saw active duty in the armed forces during World War II, later explains that the objective of the One Nation Group that he helped to found in 1950, was to create a new and just post-War settlement, that would "bind our nation together," and establish the society for which the War had been waged in the first place.

Neither an original nor a profound economic thinker, as Prime Minister, Sir Edward came to muddle-headed decisions, such as abolishing resale price maintenance, leading

to the supermarket blight that has ruined many a community. That being said, and though one might beg to disagree with his glowing view of Keynes, he did have convictions.

"[T]wo books which came to prominence during my time at Oxford . . . convinced me . . . that neither socialism nor the pure free market could provide the answer. . . . the first was Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. . . . Although his ideas were not put into practice in Britain until after the Second World War, they provided some intellectual basis for Roosevelt's New Deal, which was already successfully pulling America out of depression. It was the Keynesians, and Keynes Cambridge protégé John Hicks, in particular, who proved that the New Deal could work as well in principle as it did in practice.

"The second work . . . was Harold Macmillan's *The Middle Way*, published in 1938 . . . a plea for planned capitalism, arguing that a degree of economic planning could make commerce and industry more efficient and generate the resources that would help protect the needy in society. . . . These works provided the philosophical basis for the One Nation Group which I helped to found as a young MP after the War."

In 1979 Sir Edward was succeeded as Prime Minister by Maggie Thatcher, whom he detested to the end. "I was out of sympathy with the monetarist, neo-liberal doctrines to which my successor was beginning to become attached, and which

I could not believe to be in the long-term interests of the party or of the country."

He was particularly concerned about the impact of monetarism on the youth:

"[One should not] allow young people to receive wages more appropriate to slave labor than to a modern industrialized economy. A system of minimum wages is essential for a properly balanced society. In Britain, we had industrial wages councils through every form of party and coalition from the time Churchill introduced them in 1909, until the John Major government abolished them in 1993. The argument that such arrangements adversely affect competitiveness cannot be sustained. . . . Set at a realistic level, a minimum wage forces the employer to improve his own efficiency rather than exploiting his employees."

One of his sharpest clashes with the Thatcherite grouping, was over the reunification of Germany, that he strongly supported: "I was appalled by the rabid, bigoted, xenophobic attacks on Germany within the UK during this momentous period. . . . Mrs. Thatcher undermined at a stroke the trust which a whole generation of German politicians had reposed in us. . . . A united Germany had no designs on 'taking over Europe.' "

And elsewhere he writes, "Our membership of the Commonwealth is still important to us, but it cannot be the main bedrock for . . . pursuit of our fundamental national interests.

"We should stop hankering after an imperial past which will not return. . . ."

Finally, one should point to Sir Edward's ceaseless efforts, which included travelling to Iraq to meet with Saddam Hussein, to head off the 1990 Gulf War:

"My intentions were threefold: to ensure that every diplomatic route . . . was fully explored; to put the 1990 crisis into its proper cultural and historical perspective; and to do my best to ensure that whatever arrangement was made at the end of the crisis . . . was overwhelmingly acceptable to the Arab world."

These interventions led to newspaper headlines such as "Traitor Ted" (the *Sun*) and "Fury at Ted the Traitor" (the *Daily Star*), or "Heath, Isolated and Wrong" (the *Sunday Times*).

He continued to intervene in Iraq's favor after the War, protesting at the embargo: "Sanctions generally punish the weak, the sick, the elderly. . . . In Iraq, I have seen the consequences with my own eyes, and it is scarcely to be on the side of 'appeasement' to be moved by the plight of decent, humble people who are forced to cling to life and dignity by a thread, because of the arrogance and obduracy of politicians. . . ."

The quotations above, taken from the autobiographical *The Course of My Life* (1998), may go some way to clear up Sir Edward's otherwise mysterious decision to suddenly appear, if discreetly, at the time of greatest danger both to Lyndon LaRouche's life, and to his political mission.

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