

DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT – SOUTH WALES.

Report on Campaign Launch

Vision Europe campaign launch, at the Village Hotel and Leisure Centre, Tues. 8th Nov. '05.

Speakers: Russell Walters, Director of the Democracy Movement.

Steve Radford, President of the Liberal Party.

Ian Phillips, who chaired the meeting, opened by welcoming everyone and asked for a special vote of thanks to Russell Walters and his team who have worked so hard all these years, and without whom there would be no campaign. The audience responded with an appreciative round of applause. He went on to announce the plan to build up the active membership in South Wales and start a branch in Swansea, to fill the gap between the Carmarthen and Cardiff branches. A South Wales newsletter is now being produced, available by post for a sub of £3 p.a.

The chairman welcomed **Steve Radford**, President of the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party had been formed 120 years ago from a non-conformist background. It had always been strongly supported in Wales. Its cornerstone policy was 'free trade', which all began with the repeal of the Corn Laws. These laws had imposed a tariff on imported corn, set to keep the price of home produced corn higher and therefore make the landowners more wealthy. We now had 1000s of 'corn laws' from the EU, in the form of the quotas and regulations imposed on business. In other words, there is nothing liberal about the EU. We are subject to ridiculous regulations e.g. on the size of labels on Fire Extinguishers. Steve's organisation had to change all theirs because the labels were too big! Liberal philosophy is about 'free and open government'. By contrast the EU is about closed and unrepresentative government. The EU is now making 60% of our legislation. Furthermore, its accounts have not been passed by auditors for 10 years...if Liverpool City Council was as corrupt, he and his colleagues would be in gaol. Ashley Mote, MEP, had reported that there are 460 overseas bank accounts for holding EU funds for which there is no accounting at all. We had taxation, but next to no representation. The Liberal Party's slogan for the alternative to the EU is for a 'co-operative commonwealth of European partners'. The pro-EU opposition tried to brand us as 'Little Englanders' and 'xenophobic', which is ridiculous because we are a great global trading nation and trade is the key to sustaining peaceful relations. The Liberal Party believed in a broad based campaign and fully supported the Democracy Movement in its Vision Europe proposal.

In response to a question from the audience about the relationship to the Lib. Dems, Steve said they were an opportunist grouping. Charles Kennedy was never a Liberal. For example, they had thrown out a motion to put a cap on EU spending. Accountability, Diversity and Freedom were Liberal principles. In Liverpool City Council there was now an internal court which had placed councillors on trial for the new offence of 'lack of respect'. But the right to dissent and challenge is a cornerstone of democracy. Now we hear that all EU staff and families are immune from prosecution.

The chairman invited the audience to share our expression of thanks to Steve for his talk and his travelling from Liverpool at short notice to help us out for the evening.

The chairman then introduced **Russell Walters**, Director of the Democracy Movement, and recalling the occasion, in Swansea, when he given a very clear and concise explanation of the EU Constitution, at the time we were demanding a referendum on it. Within a few days of that event, the referendum had been granted... 'can we do it again, Russell?'

Russell began with a short history of the Eurosceptic movement, reminding us that if it had not been for the late James Goldsmith's Referendum Party, the replacement of the £pound by the Euro would have taken place soon after the 1997 General Election. Russell himself had joined in 1998, in the days of the Referendum Movement...which went on to become the Democracy Movement. The promised euro-referendum was never held because of hostile public opinion.

The Democracy Movement has had a mixture of successes and failures. We failed to stop the Treaty of Amsterdam. Then in the 2001 general election we chose to run an information campaign about MPs and candidates in 200 constituencies, and played a major role in removing pro-euro MPs or blocking pro-euro candidates. We failed to stop the Treaty of Nice, but more recently we have stopped the EU Constitution, with the help of the French and Dutch people. But all along not a single EU law has been repealed and things go from bad to worse, with developing plans for an EU army and in particular the EU criminal justice system/EU mediated criminal penalties. There is no room for complacency. A second referendum in France could succeed, because the French 'NO' was in part only a protest vote. Nevertheless, we have a campaigning opportunity now for probably about two years.

We are frequently asked why we do not now campaign for a Yes/No referendum on membership. Unfortunately the thinking of the (EU-) softest centre and centre-left is that withdrawal from the EU still not acceptable. We have always been a defensive campaign, but are now shifting on to the 'front foot' with the 'Europe of Democracies' idea. This proposal goes further than simple withdrawal, and would do away with the Commission, Parliament, currency and all the rest of the trappings of EU statehood. We would focus on a relationship through institutions such as the Council of Europe, with opportunities for agreements, but with full law-making sovereignty returned to the nations. The new campaign is essentially a platform for continuing to advance strong arguments and educate public opinion for an eventual referendum.

One main argument is that the signing of 22 Trade agreements with nations outside the EU demonstrates that independence is no barrier to trade with the EU. Britain could become one of those trading nations. In response to a question, Russell said that exposing the insidious EU origins of many apparent UK policies is a hard task and has risky implications of crying 'conspiracy'. But with regard to Corpus Juris and the EU criminal justice proposals, there is resonance with civil liberties organisations in UK. Asked about research into campaigning methods, Russell said that it was generally agreed that a mixture of separate campaigns from different political camps, Conservatives/Greens/Unions, would work best in the event of a referendum.

After some general discussion, the chairman thanked Russell very much for his talk and coming down to launch the campaign.