

**ENGLAND OUR ENGLAND** by Vernon Coleman, Blue Books, Devon (UK), 2004, pp 123, £8.99 (pbk), ISBN: 1-899726-21-7.

**THE BLIGHT OF BLAIRISM** by Francis Bennion, Lester Publishing, Oxford, 2002, pp 325, £15.95 (hbk), ISBN: 0-9542855-0-6.

Few issues have been as divisive in modern British political discourse as Europe. Passionate advocates of greater integration between the nation-states that constitute the European Union constantly find themselves challenged by those who believe that the European "project" presents a threat of monumental proportions to democracy and freedom as practised in the UK. Among the more robust publications on the 'Euroseptic' side of the argument is this slim, but powerfully argued volume by Vernon Coleman.

Dr Coleman pulls no punches in describing the menace that "ever-closer" union with Europe poses to the British way of life (though he does rather over-egg the pudding by claiming that a "war against Europe" is "far, far more important. . . . than the war against terrorism"). The book consists of some interesting nuggets of information, e.g. that the UK currently pays £1,250,000 per hour as membership fee of the EU, that for every pound that England receives from Brussels the British taxpayer forks out £4.15, that 90 per cent of all new legislation in England comes from the EU, that if the UK joins the euro it will have to take on part of the EU's £ 1,200 billion pension debt, and so on.

The apocalyptic tone of the book is, alas, not calculated to endear it to everyone, but Dr Coleman does rather make some very valid points. He notes, for instance, that when Edward Heath took the UK into the 'Common Market' (the EU's forerunner), he may have been somewhat economical with the truth about its implications. Based on papers released from the Public Records Office recently under the 30-year-old rule, Heath, says Dr Coleman, "knew that the Common Market was the beginning of a one nation European superstate -but he told electors that this would not happen". That Heath later reportedly admitted knowing about the nature of the European project makes Coleman wonder why he has not been charged with treason.

Francis Bennion shares some of Coleman's misgivings about Europe - and, more generally, an equally passionate love for England -but his book is stylistically as different from Coleman's as the proverbial chalk is from cheese. The tone is more measured and the arguments developed at greater length. Bennion's book is also set on a wider canvas: he deals with as diverse a range of topics as: multiculturalism, political correctness, House of Lords reform, the Human Rights Act, 'spin doctoring' in the media, ageism, the Parliament Acts, tax law reform, jury trials, corporate homicide, and the International Criminal Court, to name but only a few. His central theme is the destruction, as he sees it, wrought by 'Blairism' to many of the UK's cherished traditions and institutions.

Blairism, he says, is a phenomenon that can be seen as "the ultimate manifestation of the intellectual shame and degradation known as Democracy. This form of government panders to the ignorant populace, instead of doing what intelligence and art tells us ought to be done to achieve humanity's highest aims." Though he fears that it may be too late to stem the tide, Bennion retains a glimmer of hope that something precious may yet be salvaged "Concrete example is more effective than generalised hand-wringing.," he says in justification of this highly-readable volume.