



# The Battle for British Entry into the European Community, 1971–72

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Whips and Anti-Marketeers

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Geoff Horn

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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Whipping for Europe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Postwar Chief Whips, 1945–70</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Pym’s Whips’ Office</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Principle of EC Entry: Working on the Numbers</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The EC Bill: A Matter of Confidence</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Second Reading: Repercussions and Recriminations</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Committee Stage: Tactics and Challenges</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Committee Stage: Unusual Channels</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Third Reading: Pym’s Triumph</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Conclusion: A Tale of Two Chief Whips</b>	<b>195</b>

<b>Appendix A: Pym’s Whips’ Office (1972–73)</b>	205
<b>Appendix B: Conservative &amp; Unionist Anti-Marketeers (Oct. 1971)</b>	209
<b>Appendix C: Conservative Anti-Marketeers: Diehards and Loyalists (Feb. 1972)</b>	211
<b>Appendix D: Conservative &amp; Unionist anti-Marketeers: Voting Record, EC Bill (1972)</b>	215
<b>Appendix E: Conservative and Unionist Anti-Marketeers: Voting Record, EC Bill (Clause 2)</b>	217
<b>Bibliography</b>	219
<b>Index</b>	229

## ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CACMIS	Conservative Anti-Common Market Information Service
CMSC	Common Market Safeguards Campaign
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CGE	Conservative Group for Europe
CPC	Conservative Political Centre
EDM	Early Day Motion
EC	European Community
EC Bill	European Communities Bill
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
KBO	Keep Britain Out
PCP	Parliamentary Conservative Party
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Pym's Whips' Office, 1972–73	54
Table 6.1	Conservative anti-Marketeers: diehards and loyalists, Second Reading (Feb. 1972)	116
Table 6.2	Conservative anti-Marketeers: diehards and loyalists, constituency pressure	118
Table 9.1	Conservative and Unionist anti-Marketeers: voting record, EC Bill (1972)	178
Table 9.2	<i>Inconsistent dissenters</i> : voting record, Clause 2 of EC Bill (25 April–14 June 1972)	182



## Introduction: Whipping for Europe

The UK's membership of the European Union (EU) was punctuated by notable parliamentary rebellions, challenging the reputation of the House of Commons for high levels of party cohesion. The whips of both major parties often struggled to contain dissent over the European issue, especially when it represented wider ideological divisions. Initially these intra-party conflicts appeared more serious within the Labour Party, with splits over Europe highlighting a growing left-right divide that contributed to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) breakaway of 1981.<sup>1</sup> Conservative dissent intensified in the early 1990s after Margaret Thatcher's removal as Prime Minister, and in response to the Maastricht Treaty. The proposed widening and deepening of European integration precipitated an upsurge of Conservative euroscepticism, reflected in the repeated rebellions against the Conservative Government's European Communities (Amendment) Bill by backbench dissenters within the Fresh Start Group.<sup>2</sup> It also led to the formation of small eurosceptic challenger parties on the political right, such as the Referendum Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Although both major parties suffered backbench dissent in response to the negotiations and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2009), Conservative euroscepticism emerged as a major party management problem during David Cameron's premiership; a period blighted by the failure to neutralise the European issue.<sup>3</sup> Cameron ultimately responded to eurosceptic dissent, and the electoral success of UKIP, by promising a

referendum on British membership of the EU, resulting in a narrow majority in favour of Britain exiting the EU (Brexit) in June 2016. Cameron's subsequent resignation was followed by a period of parliamentary chaos and stalemate under Theresa May's minority Conservative Government; a premiership that failed to achieve a parliamentary consensus over how the UK should leave the EU. May's withdrawal agreement was defeated by an unprecedented margin of 432–202, with 118 Conservative MPs (overwhelmingly comprised of pro-Brexit MPs) rebelling against her proposed deal.<sup>4</sup> It would take the populist premiership of Boris Johnson, an attempt to prorogue Parliament, the withdrawal of the whip from 21 Conservative MPs, and a general election in December 2019, to finally break the parliamentary stalemate and 'Get Brexit Done'.<sup>5</sup> It is tempting to see Brexit as the culmination of the Maastricht rebellions of the 1990s. However, although largely dormant during the 1980s, Conservative euroscepticism was an important feature of the parliamentary battle for entry during the early 1970s. The original eurosceptics—the anti-Marketeters—were unable to prevent the UK's accession to the European Community (EC) in January 1973, but were the founding fathers of the rejectionist movement that triumphed in January 2020, bringing to an end 47 years of EU membership.

A small but determined group of Conservative anti-Marketeters had opposed Britain's membership of the EC since the original applications of the 1960s: one Conservative MP voted against the original application of Harold Macmillan's Conservative Government in 1961, but 20 abstained; 26 Conservative MPs defied a three-line whip in opposing the party line of supporting the second application by Harold Wilson's Labour Government in 1967.<sup>6</sup> Their dissent proved immaterial, as both applications were vetoed by the French President, Charles de Gaulle. But, after the 1970 General Election, Edward Heath's Conservative Government successfully overcame the French obstacle to UK membership during lengthy intergovernmental negotiations. Heath and his chief negotiator, Geoffrey Rippon, won a significant diplomatic success by persuading the new French President, George Pompidou, of Britain's pro-European commitment. Agreement was reached, and terms of entry finalised by June 1971. But, having agreed terms with the six original member states, the Heath Government faced a parliamentary battle for the consent of the House of Commons before accession could take place.<sup>7</sup> Membership might initially have appeared a formality. The leadership of both major parties had favoured entry before the 1970 general election, but Labour's

official position changed to one of opposition to the negotiated terms, despite a significant rump of dedicated Labour pro-Europeans, led by Labour's Deputy Leader, Roy Jenkins. Less focus has been given to the significant scepticism on the Conservative backbenches. In early 1971, as negotiations developed, approximately one-third of the Parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) were either undecided or opposed to British membership of the Common Market (the term commonly used for the European Economic Community (EEC), created by the Treaty of Rome in 1957).<sup>8</sup> Thirty-nine Conservative and Unionist MPs were determined to resist their own Government's policy and oppose entry. Despite their minority status within the Conservative Party, the parliamentary arithmetic gave them power beyond their numbers. With the Heath Government holding a parliamentary majority of less than 30, and the Labour pro-Europeans whipped to oppose entry, it was possible that 15–20 persistent diehards could have wrecked the pro-European cause.

The Conservative anti-Marketeers were inspired by the formidable parliamentary skills of Enoch Powell, a former Cabinet minister with a significant public following due to his anti-immigration stance. Powell's highly controversial and divisive 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968 led to his dismissal from Heath's Shadow Cabinet, and the development of a personal and political feud with the Conservative leader.<sup>9</sup> By 1971–72, Powell's all-consuming commitment to opposing entry into Europe brought him into alliance with long-standing anti-Marketeers on the Conservative backbenches: experienced elder statesmen, such as the former health minister, Sir Derek Walker-Smith, and the 'father of the House', Sir Robin Turton; the energetic and respected backbench organiser, Neil Marten; veteran backbench rebels, such as Anthony Fell and Sir Gerald Nabarro; and a younger generation of MPs, including Powell's disciple, John Biffen, who later served in Thatcher's Cabinet, and future Maastricht rebels, such as Richard Body, Roger Moate, and Teddy Taylor. They were supported by a number of Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) MPs who were part of the PCP during the early 1970s, including their future leader, James Molyneaux. There has been a tendency to overlook their importance and downplay the extent of original Conservative divisions over Europe, which appeared less problematic than Labour's European schism. However, Aker has drawn attention to the militant organisation of the anti-Marketeers, especially under the leadership of Powell and Marten in 1971–72; while Crowson has highlighted how, despite different ideological strands and varying degrees of emphasis, the anti-Marketeer position echoed the

arguments of a later generation of Conservative eurosceptics.<sup>10</sup> The anti-Marketeers believed European integration would significantly erode Britain's national independence and self-determination, destroy the constitutional sanctity of parliamentary sovereignty, threaten the nation's traditional global trading relationships with Commonwealth countries, and prove particularly damaging to national interests in certain policy sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries. The most committed anti-Marketeers were largely traditionalists who prioritised the retention of full national and parliamentary sovereignty, whereas dedicated pro-Europeans were modernisers who advocated the benefits of sharing sovereignty in Europe, in the context of greater international interdependence.

The Conservative Government would rely on pressure and persuasion in their pursuit of EC entry, but a persistent group of diehard dissenters on the Conservative backbenches—labelled ‘the dirty dozen’<sup>11</sup>—would continue to prioritise their rejectionist principles ahead of loyalty to the party leadership and its Europe policy. When combined with the Labour Opposition, the anti-Marketeers had the numbers to prevent entry into Europe, and they came very close to defeating the Conservative Government at various stages during the passage of the enabling legislation—the European Communities Bill (EC Bill) of 1972. Ultimately, their dissent was nullified by a masterly whipping operation overseen by the Government's Chief Whip, Francis Pym.

### CONSERVATIVE WHIPS AND EUROSCEPTIC DISSENTERS

The UK's entry into Europe is viewed as the outstanding policy success of Edward Heath's Conservative Government of 1970–74; a period otherwise marked by crises in economic policy and industrial relations, and the failure to find workable solutions to the tragic conflict unfolding in Northern Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Political historians have stressed that the achievement of entry was closely identified with Heath's pro-Europeanism and is central to his political legacy.<sup>13</sup> Heath's official biographer stated that ‘whatever one's views on European unity, it is impossible not to recognise the grandeur of his achievement’.<sup>14</sup> Cabinet colleagues were also effusive in their praise for his passion and commitment: Jim Prior suggested that ‘no one other than Ted would have taken Britain into Europe...Ted had the sheer determination to find the answers and overcome all the difficulties’; Heath's Chancellor, Anthony Barber, considered that it was ‘no exaggeration to say that this change was brought about primarily through the

perseverance of one man'; William Whitelaw acknowledged the importance of Heath's leadership, and the negotiating skills of Rippon, although he also reflected on the key role played by Pym, the Government's Chief Whip, in ensuring the EC Bill passed the Commons.<sup>15</sup>

This focus on Heath's role is understandable, given his passionate pro-Europeanism. But less attention has been paid to the critical role played by Pym's whipping operation, especially his successful management of the legislative process. In part, this reflects the more extensive consideration afforded to Heath's premiership, and the limited coverage that has been given to the passage of the EC Bill. Heath's official biographer devoted merely one page to coverage of the Bill, reflecting his subject's more peripheral role in managing the process. According to Robert Armstrong, his Principal Private Secretary, Heath considered entry 'an accomplished fact' after the Commons voted in favour of the negotiated terms of entry in October 1971. However, this was a vote of principle, and the Government's policy required enabling legislation to pass the Commons in the face of a determined Labour Opposition and the hostility of Conservative dissenters. Armstrong confirmed that it was left to Pym to perform 'miracles to get the Bill through the House'.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, another biographer of Heath, John Campbell, recognised the enormity of the challenge that was overcome by Pym and his whips: 'to maintain the Government's majority over such a period was unprecedented'.<sup>17</sup> Michael Jopling, who served in the Whips' Office under Pym, and was later Thatcher's Chief Whip (1979–83), asserted that 'he had never known a more successful or more complex exercise of whipping' than that overseen by Pym during the passage of the EC Bill.<sup>18</sup> Despite these acknowledgements, coverage of the role played by Pym and his whips in securing British entry into Europe has largely been confined to his success in convincing Heath of the need for a free vote on the principle of entry in October 1971.<sup>19</sup> This decision was undeniably significant, but did not guarantee the subsequent safe passage of the enabling legislation. Far less attention has been given to how the EC Bill was secured or the critical role played by the Government Whips' Office.

It can be argued that the whipping operation was instrumental in ensuring the UK accession in 1973, yet coverage has largely relied on two influential studies published in the years immediately after accession: Uwe Kitzinger's *Diplomacy and Persuasion* (1973) and Philip Norton's *Conservative Dissidents* (1978). Kitzinger's book provides an invaluable study of the key events leading to membership, including detailed accounts

of the negotiations and the government campaign to gain wider support for entry among the British public and the wider Conservative party. The most relevant section, relating to the parliamentary battle and the challenges of party management (Chapter 13), highlights the tactical approach and dilemmas faced by the two main parties. The Conservative Government faced a determined dissenting minority of Conservative anti-Marketeers, while the Labour Opposition under Wilson attempted to manage a larger dissenting minority of Labour pro-Europeans. Kitzinger's assessment was that the EC Bill passed, and UK entry was secured, due to a combination of luck, Labour pro-European abstentions, but 'mostly by Conservative management', although he provides little analysis of what this party management entailed beyond a 'tight bill' and the success of the Government's guillotine motion.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, luck and Labour abstentions played a part, but how did Pym's whipping operation manage Conservative dissent and exploit the opportunities provided by Labour divisions over Europe?

Norton's study provides valuable data on the battle for EC entry, which is analysed in the context of a wider outbreak of Conservative dissent during the Heath Government of 1970–74. The central argument of his book was that Heath's leadership style was primarily to blame for rising intra-party dissent, due to his poor communication skills, failure to utilise patronage and his pursuit of unpopular policies. The anti-Marketeer resistance was characterised as the beginning of a tumultuous period: 'the most persistent Conservative intra-party dissent in post-war history', with EC entry attracting the greatest and most consistent dissent.<sup>21</sup> In his chapter on whipping (Chapter 6), Norton focused on the general approach of the Conservative whips to party management, with the European issue providing an example of the generally tolerant approach that was taken. His analysis benefited from interviews with Pym and another senior whip from this period, Tim Fortescue, as well as several Conservative anti-Marketeers. Their testimony is influential in Norton's evaluation that, in managing intra-party dissent, the whips used 'a tolerant and accommodating attitude', 'quiet persuasion' and a 'subtle approach' to managing dissent, rather than a disciplinary or coercive approach.<sup>22</sup> This meant less time was wasted trying to persuade committed anti-Marketeers, who would only be alienated further by attempts to convert them to the pro-European cause. More time and effort was therefore available to work on less committed anti-Marketeers ('waverers'). Norton's excellent analysis still raises questions as to what a 'subtle approach' entailed. It is also clear that 'quiet persuasion' was unlikely to secure the acquiescence of enough

Conservative dissenters to ensure the successful passage of the EC Bill. The 39 Conservative and Unionists who voted against the principle of entry in October 1971 easily outnumbered the Conservative Government's parliamentary majority of less than 30. How could a tolerant whipping operation hope to convince enough anti-Marketeer dissenters—many of whom were long-standing opponents of entry—to vote against their principles? Without the successful application of pressure and persuasion, the legislation required for EC entry was seemingly imperilled. As Jopling stated: 'anybody looking at the arithmetic would say you can't do it'.<sup>23</sup>

Norton's perspective broadly reflected a revisionist perspective on whipping that developed among political scientists from the 1960s onwards. For example, Anthony King, considered the role of the whips in the context of an outbreak of dissent in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) during the latter years of the Wilson Government (1966–70). He stressed the lack of sanctions available when faced with the committed rebel: if an MP is determined to dissent from official policy, is undeterred by appeals to party loyalty, and uninterested in ministerial office, there seems very little that the whips can do.<sup>24</sup> The revisionist perspective is based on the assertion that the modern whipping system is more focused on personnel management or the welfare of MPs rather than discipline; an assessment that has often relied on evidence from former whips. An early example of such testimony was an interview in *The Listener* by Martin Redmayne, the Chief Whip during Macmillan's premiership (1959–63): he stressed the vital role the whips play as a channel of communication between ministers and backbenchers, mediating in policy disputes to help avoid the risk of a significant party split, with party discipline a by-product of successful party management and mutual understanding between the leadership and its backbench MPs.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Cowley has suggested that a revisionist perspective, stressing the relevance of good personnel management, and downplaying the whip's role 'as arm twister, bully and Machiavelli all rolled into one', remains the consensus position among scholars.<sup>26</sup> However, Searing provided some qualification to this view: 'although whipping may have lost its rough edges' since the 1950s, the revisionist perspective could arguably go too far in stressing the benign nature of modern practice, based on accepting the 'contestable' arguments of former whips.<sup>27</sup> Dissenters who have been on the receiving end of a whipping regime, and felt pressured to vote against their principles, often have a different perspective.

There are important questions to be asked about methods of pressure and persuasion given the essential role of government whips. Their fundamental task is to secure government majorities in the division lobbies and avoid any consequential defeats over controversial and divisive issues. But what can be done when communication is not enough, when the policy gap between ministers and dissenters cannot be bridged, and where few compromises or concessions are possible? What methods or tactics can be employed when dissenters are determined to prioritise their conscience over party loyalty on a critical policy issue? The revisionist perspective has emphasised the need for whips to tread carefully; if dissenters remain determined to persist in their dissent, this must be accepted as unavoidable, as ‘the disciplinary or coercive powers associated with the whips...are few and limited in value’.<sup>28</sup> Any discussion of the ‘dark arts’ are downplayed in favour of stressing the importance of viewing whips (and the Chief Whip in particular) as largely tolerant or benign operators, who have few effective tools or sanctions at their disposal. This perspective inevitably conflicts with more traditional or critical perceptions of how whips use bullying, blackmail and bribery to maintain control over backbench dissenters; an impression encouraged by the secretive nature of Westminster whipping operations, obscured from the public gaze, and mired in suspicions of foul play.<sup>29</sup>

Negative perceptions of the Machiavellian nature of whipping were highlighted as a result of the Maastricht rebellions in the early 1990s. In a 1995 BBC documentary, *Westminster’s Secret Service*, Michael Cockerell claimed that ‘the Tory whips operate by a subtle mix of arguments, threat and promise’, and are often accused of using the ‘dark arts’ to manipulate or bully backbenchers into voting against their conscience. These impressions were reinforced by their preference for operating behind the scenes, to avoid disputes with backbench MPs breaking out in public.<sup>30</sup> Cockerell’s documentary was produced in the wake of allegations made by Maastricht rebels concerning the bullying behaviour of the whips, especially the notorious David Lightbown. Known for his ‘enforcer role’, Lightbown would use his considerable physical presence to intimidate rebels, although it has also been suggested that he ‘cultivated the myth of the whip as burly bully boy’ to maximum effect.<sup>31</sup> The ‘legend of Lightbown’ is an example of how rebels will emphasise the extreme behaviour of whips, while former whips are more likely to dismiss these claims as exaggerated or isolated incidents. During the heat of parliamentary battle, Maastricht rebels claimed that they faced intimidation, threats, bullying and even physical

assault from colleagues and whips.<sup>32</sup> Andrew Mitchell, who served in the Whips' Office during Maastricht, has suggested that, despite occasional instances of physical confrontation and psychological humiliation, it was more usual for persuasive methods to combine friendly cajoling and promises of patronage or promotion.<sup>33</sup> But the Maastricht rebels strongly suspected that more subtle or indirect methods were being coordinated by the Whips' Office: sending informants or spies to their meetings ('a whips' nark') to report back on their discussions and tactics;<sup>34</sup> orchestrating and directing Conservative Central Office (CCO) agents to ferment trouble in their constituencies, and communicating with key officers in their local association to induce pressure, such as critical motions;<sup>35</sup> feeding information to the Conservative press, and encouraging articles critical of rebel behaviour;<sup>36</sup> and procedural tactics, including judicious use of closure motions, and the suspension of 'the 10 o'clock rule', leading to all-night sittings that depleted the allotted time for scrutiny and made life uncomfortable for rebels.<sup>37</sup> Although the most dedicated eurosceptic might be characterised as a 'whips' nightmare'—uninterested in patronage or promotion and largely immune to pressure and persuasion—other 'waverers' proved more susceptible to threats, promises and appeals to party loyalty; some found the physical act of walking past colleagues to vote in the opposition lobby too psychologically daunting.<sup>38</sup>

### MANAGING LOYAL DISSENT

By contrast to the more extreme revelations and bitter divisions associated with the Maastricht era, Pym's earlier whipping operation has been viewed as an ideal or even virtuous model of how party management at Westminster should be conducted: shorn of bullying or coercion and infused with toleration of dissent; a quietly efficient yet considerate regime, which prioritised communication and management over the disciplinary function. This approach reflected a gradual culture shift that occurred in the Conservative Whips' Office during the postwar period. The authoritarian approach, originally associated with the pre-war Conservative whipping regime of Captain David Margesson (1931–40) and, to a lesser extent, continued in the immediate postwar period, had gradually given way to more tolerant and consensual operations.<sup>39</sup> An excessively military-style disciplinarian culture came to be viewed as outdated and counter-productive, while maintaining good personal relationships between whips and backbench MPs, based on communication, mutual understanding

and common courtesy, would become the preferred mode of operation by the time Pym became Chief Whip in 1970. A code of conduct had developed: MPs who felt compelled to follow their conscience were expected to keep the whips informed of any intended acts of dissent and, in return, the whips would not threaten, rebuke or sanction dissenters, although they might attempt to persuade those deemed more responsive to the pull of party loyalty.<sup>40</sup> In an interview for a BBC radio series in 1972, Pym confirmed his preference for a consensual and consultative approach when managing relations with backbench dissenters:

We are in constant touch with them and none of this goes on behind one's back or only very, very rarely. They'll come and say they're worried about something, and then one will talk to them about it. One may or may not be able to persuade them about it. One may arrange for them to see a minister, to have a meeting to discuss what can be done, and the thing will be all worked out, and, if at the end of the day they adhere to their point of view and will not support whatever it is we propose, then...it will be done because there is an honest difference of opinion.<sup>41</sup>

Pym substantiated the revisionist perspective by emphasising that the role of Chief Whip was to consult, communicate and attempt to persuade. There were no sanctions or disciplinary processes used against those who followed their conscience and voted against the Government: 'the idea, which is so prevalent in the public mind, that discipline applies and sanctions exist and I've got some medieval instrument in the back cupboard to bring out and threaten people to do things they don't want to do, is totally and absolutely untrue'.<sup>42</sup> Pym's preferred approach was in keeping with the consensual values associated with One Nation Conservatism. For a brief period in the mid-1980s, he was the leader of the One Nation tradition, standing up against the Thatcherite ascendancy. He would later refer to traditional Conservative values as 'founded on the need to listen to people, whether one agrees with them or not' and to 'accept the legitimacy of alternative views'.<sup>43</sup> This consensual approach generally ensured good relations between whips and backbench dissenters during the 1970–74 Parliament. The approach of Pym's Whips' Office was characterised as one of 'charm and persistence', rather than the bullying approach preferred by some of his predecessors.<sup>44</sup> This approach can be viewed as mutually beneficial to whips and dissenters. It recognised the strong convictions of the most dedicated anti-Marketees, who in turn accepted that

the whips must be able to keep the leadership informed of the expected size of their majority ahead of any given vote. From the perspective of the Whips' Office, this approach aided vital intelligence gathering used to target potentially responsive dissenters and maintain government majorities in the division lobbies.

The approach adopted by Pym and the Conservative dissenters of the early 1970s has been referred to as 'loyal dissent'. This concept can be defined as the maintenance of good relations between whips and dissenters through regular communication and mutual understanding. It is a code of conduct by which dissenters do not face punitive sanctions, so long as they observe established conventions of behaviour; they demonstrate party loyalty by keeping the Whips' Office informed of their voting intentions. It has been suggested that loyal dissent operated effectively during the passage of the European Communities Act (1972), but broke down during the passage of the European Communities (Amendment) Act in 1993, as some Maastricht rebels failed to keep the whips informed of their voting intentions, voted against their own Government on procedural questions, and generally demonstrated higher levels of militancy and organisation.<sup>45</sup> Both bills were vital to Britain's future in Europe and proved controversial and divisive in the party, leading to persistent dissent. However, there were no government defeats or whip withdrawals in 1972; by comparison, there were two significant defeats for the Major Government in 1993 and, subsequently, eight Maastricht-related whip withdrawals and one whip resignation. The repercussions of Maastricht for intra-party Conservative divisions reverberated long after the final vote. It is, however, important to recognise the different context in which loyal dissent operated during the two periods. Despite the high levels of anti-Marketeer dissent of 1971–72, this was surpassed in scale by the Maastricht rebellions, reflecting the growth of Conservative euroscepticism in the wider party.<sup>46</sup> It has been argued that, by the 1990s, Conservative whips could not depend as much upon constituency pressure to help induce party loyalty among the eurosceptic rebels.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps, as a consequence, the 41 Conservative backbench rebels who voted against their Government on Third Reading of the Maastricht Treaty in May 1993 easily surpassed the largest Conservative rebellion during the passing of the EC Bill in 1972. However, the Conservative Chief Whip, Richard Ryder, was more fortunate than his predecessor (Pym) in one key respect: he faced a far more pro-European Labour Party with an official position of abstention on major votes, which enabled the European Communities

(Amendment) Bill to easily pass its Second Reading in May 1992 with a majority of 244. Over 20 years earlier, in February 1972, the Conservative Government barely survived a close vote during Second Reading, which was treated as a vote of confidence; a majority of eight was only achieved through the support of five Liberal MPs and a handful of Labour abstentions.<sup>48</sup> Due to Labour's official position of opposing the EC Bill in 1972, far less Conservative dissenters were required to defeat the Government and even cause its downfall, which would almost certainly have prevented the UK's entry into Europe in 1973.

### REVEALING THE SECRETS OF THE WHIPS' OFFICE

The term 'whipping' derives from the fox hunting traditions of the English landed gentry who dominated Parliament before the advent of mass democracy. Party managers (or whips) would maintain discipline and control in the manner of the master of the hunt, ensuring that Members did not stray too far from the pack. The first instance of whipping in the House of Commons is said to have involved a letter requiring an MP's regular attendance in November 1621.<sup>49</sup> In the modern era, whipping developed to ensure greater party cohesion, making a major contribution to efficient party government but also reducing the independence of MPs. By the mid twentieth century, one prominent scholarly observer noted that rigid party voting in the Commons was the overwhelming norm, with the results in the division lobbies 'so close to 100 per cent that there was no longer any point in measuring it'.<sup>50</sup> The traditionalist perspective holds that whips focus on discipline and sanctions to help maintain high levels of party cohesion, although a revisionist perspective has become more influential in relation to the core functions of the whips. According to Stuart, these primarily include 'management, communication and persuasion'.<sup>51</sup> The Chief Whip, in partnership with his Private Secretary and the Leader of the House of Commons, must ensure that the government's business and legislative timetable is facilitated through regular communication with the Opposition to fix deals through the 'usual channels'. Once agreement is reached, the timetable and the relative importance of votes are communicated to the respective parliamentary parties in the 'weekly whip': although this document is not primarily focused on voting intentions, it sets out whether an MP's attendance is required ('three-line whip'), expected ('two-line whip') or optional ('one-line whip'). There is an implicit assumption of party loyalty, but dissent is not formally prohibited. Effective

party management and ongoing communication are essential to ensure that the government's majority is maintained by whipping MPs to be in attendance and persuading them to provide loyal support in the division lobbies. This persuasion may involve explaining the merits of government policy to a sceptical backbencher or cajoling a would-be dissenter into prioritising party loyalty. Whips gather and communicate vital intelligence on the state of opinion in the parliamentary party—acting as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the government to pre-empt trouble in relation to particular policies or legislation. The Whips’ Office will also closely monitor the performance and views of ministers and backbenchers, with this intelligence helping inform a Chief Whip in their role as patronage secretary to the Prime Minister, advising on ministerial appointments, promotions and the award of honours.<sup>52</sup>

More in-depth understanding of how whips manage dissent, especially on particularly controversial and divisive policy issues, has been hampered by a code of secrecy, and too often reliant on ‘comment and rumour’ rather than clear evidence.<sup>53</sup> This is understandable. Although formally part of the machinery of government, whips often operate informally: Whips’ Office meetings are unminuted; whips maintain group solidarity, and the confidence and trust of MPs by exercising discretion; whipping usually operates by word of mouth, observing and gathering intelligence on the views of Members by listening to gossip in the Commons’ tea rooms and bars, or holding private conversations in the corridors around Westminster; and many Whips’ Office documents, including personal files on MPs, are destroyed or closed to researchers. There is, therefore, a reliance on interviewing former whips to gain testimony, despite their obvious reluctance to fully disclose their methods. In his documentary on ‘the highly secretive Conservative Whips’ Office’, Cockerill’s attempts to interview Conservative whips, past and present, faced a boycott organised by the Chief Whip, based on the code of honour and confidentiality that demands a form of *omerta*. Of the 80 Conservative Members who had served as whips, Cockerill managed to interview a few off the record and six who appeared in the film; these included two whips who had served in Pym’s Whips’ Office during the passage of the EC Bill.<sup>54</sup> These interviews provide valuable sources of information, but political historians should ideally supplement them with other forms of evidence relating to whipping operations.

It has been observed that former whips rarely leave any private papers or publish memoirs. If they do, they tend to be unrevealing about their

time in the Whips' Office.<sup>55</sup> All former whips are expected to avoid disclosing the confidential secrets of the Office. The diaries of the former Conservative MP, Gyles Brandreth, provide one of the earliest examples of a former whip breaking this code of secrecy. After the first edition was published in 1999, he faced 'blackballing' and received an anonymous envelope with 'a sheet of white paper that contained nothing but a large black spot: a mark of shame'.<sup>56</sup> Since the 1990s, the veil of secrecy has gradually lifted. Two former Conservative Chief Whips, Tim Renton and Andrew Mitchell, published books discussing their knowledge and experience of the role, but there is a general dearth of memoirs or private papers left behind by those who served as whips during the passage of the EC Bill. At the time of writing, there was one set of private papers available: Bernard Weatherill's papers at the University of Kent relate largely to his time as Speaker of the House of Commons (1983–92), and contained no documents relating to his twelve years in the Conservative Whips' Office (1967–79); Pym's private papers remained closed, and it seems extremely unlikely that papers relating to his time as a Chief Whip will be made available to researchers in the future. Pym did not publish a conventional memoir, but his book, *The Politics of Consent* (1984), contains some reflections on his time as Chief Whip and how he managed dissent. Ken Clarke was junior whip in 1972. His memoirs provide valuable insights into Pym's Whips' Office, including recollections of the whipping operation during the legislative process, and his role in a secret and 'highly unusual arrangement' with Labour backbenchers to help ensure the passage of the Bill.<sup>57</sup> With the passing of time, and the availability of a range of other sources, more has been revealed about how Pym's whipping operation secured UK entry into Europe.

In one memorable diary entry, Brandreth writes of the 'golden rule' of Chief Whips: they are 'silent and invisible, neither heard nor seen, never photographed, never quoted [by the press]'.<sup>58</sup> Pym provided a partial exception. Jopling revealed that, as Chief Whip, Pym gave regular weekly 'off the record' briefings to lobby journalists at Westminster. As a consequence, when political editors, such as David Wood of *The Times*, referred to the views of 'party managers', their reports can generally be treated as a reliable source of information.<sup>59</sup> Pym also gave interviews to trusted academics, such as King and Norton; he may have seen this more open approach as the best means of ensuring that gossip, rumour or suspicion did not define his whipping methods. But more revealing testimony emerged in the wake of the Maastricht rebellions of the 1990s, with