

16/2/01

THE BBC AND EUROPE

TODAY survey: January 29 - February 3, 2001**Conducted by Minotaur Media Tracking for Global Britain**

Preliminary findings

Background and considerations

In the three days beginning January 30th, the Today programme mounted a series of items by reporter Sarah Nelson on the theme of whether the UK should withdraw from the EU, culminating on February 1, with a substantial portion of the programme being devoted to the topic. To emphasise the importance of the strand, Edward Stourton, one of the presenters, was based in Brussels on February 1, where he delivered live links to the Europe items and also conducted a number of interviews.

The BBC is charged with ensuring impartiality in its coverage of political affairs. With the issue of withdrawal from the EU, it has a particularly difficult task in defining and meeting its obligation. The main problem is that the three main political parties favour continued membership. The Labour and Liberal Democrat parties want greater integration, while the Conservatives are committed not to join the Euro during the next Parliament but regard withdrawal itself (according to Edward Macmillan-Scott the head of the Conservative group in the European Parliament) as "extreme". Political parties who do support withdrawal, which include, most prominently, the UK Independence Party, and Arthur Scargill's Democratic Labour Party have a number of MEPs, but none within Westminster. A significant number of MPs drawn from all sections of the political spectrum for example John Redwood, Frank Field, Austin Mitchell and Lord Shore - are strongly Euro-sceptic, favour closer links with the US, but stop short of advocating withdrawal. A significant, but unknown, number of politicians who do support withdrawal operate within Parliament, but they do so outside the disciplines of the main political parties.

Despite the low numbers within Parliament, British public opinion, as measured by the main opinion polls, remains strongly and consistently Euro-sceptic. The most recent polls show that at least 70% do not wish to join the Euro, and between 30% and as high as 46% want complete withdrawal from the community. Europhiles argue that this is because the proper arguments have not yet been put to the public. They point to the referendum on continued membership in 1975 of what was then the Common Market in which an initial majority (in the opinion polls) for withdrawal was converted into a two-thirds majority for staying in.

Against this background, defining any "centre point" or fulcrum of balance in this debate is difficult. The BBC must not express an opinion or editorial viewpoint on the issue. It argues that its main role is to ensure that as many contrasting voices as possible are heard on such issues. Yet, the public opinion expressed in the polls is being articulated by relatively few people and there is no clearly defined central conduit through which the debates are being filtered and focused. In effect, it is a viewpoint without a channelled political presence. Pinning it down and ensuring the accurate articulation of its views is in itself a major task.

The BBC's task becomes even more difficult because in a representative democracy such as the UK, it is generally accepted that, outside election periods, individual Members of Parliament take over the handling of constituents' interests. The upshot is that, because all the three main parties favour continued membership of the EU, the case for withdrawal is not being made to the same extent as other viewpoints in the main political forums and decision-making processes of the country.

The analysis which follows seeks to establish whether, given these problems, the Today programme achieved what it set out to do in carrying out a series of special items about withdrawal - to ensure that a multiplicity of voices were heard and that fair and balanced expression was given to the case for withdrawal. This aim was expressed by Mark Damazer, the BBC's assistant director of news and current affairs, on the Today programme on February 1.

Coverage

The main items on the withdrawal theme were:

January 30: A package by Sarah Nelson exploring the reasons why some elements of industry wanted to withdraw from the EU, how Norway survived outside the EU, and why some in the US wanted the UK to join NAFTA. A spokesman for the National Institute of Economic and Social Research said that withdrawal would bring problems and benefits.

January 31: Sarah Nelson's second package, opening with the contention that "withdrawal was off the map" as far as most politicians were concerned, and going on to hear views from A Europhile and a Euro-sceptic MPs about what would happen in ten years' time if the treaties were renegotiated (but not withdrawal). A former US ambassador to the UK contended that if the UK wound down its connection with Europe, trade would suffer, while a Labour Euro-sceptic peer Lord Shore argued that closer ties with the US and fewer with the EU would be beneficial. Sarah Nelson specifically pointed out that the Conservative MP, Bill Cash, would not discuss withdrawal (raising the question why she did not speak to someone who would).

February 1:

- 6am onwards Coverage of the subject of withdrawal opened in the bulletins with coverage of the Today poll showing that 30% favour withdrawal. Voice piece by Sarah Nelson
- 6.35am, analysis by Sarah Nelson of the poll findings
- 7.15 am interviews with Conrad Black and Chris Patten, principally about the pros and cons of membership of NAFTA, with Mr Patten initially given space to rebut the findings of the Today survey.
- 7.40 Gordon Carrera examined the progress of the so-called "metric martyr", taking him to a meeting in Brussels to ask the commission why its was illegal to sell in pounds. Speakers: Danish MEP, Jonathan Faull, chief spokesman for the Commission
- 7.49 consideration of whether the BBC was biased in its European coverage, with contributions from Charles Moore, editor of the Daily Telegraph, Lord Pearson of Rannoch and reaction for the BBC from Mark Damazer, the Corporation's assistant director of news.
- 8.15 interview with foreign secretary Robin Cook, prefaced by an analysis by Angus Roxburghe.

- 8.34 package by Gordon Carrera on likely impact of withdrawal, including reactions from Christopher Gill MP, Denis McShane MP, and Nick Sparrow of ICM.
- 8.37 Quadripartite discussion on EU membership -related issues with Nigel Farage, head of the UKIP, Edward Macmillan-Scott, leader of the Conservative group of MEPs, and Neil Kinnock and Frits Bolkestein, both EU commissioners.
- 8.49 package from Sarah Nelson - the third of her series looking at withdrawal - about the cultural impact of withdrawal from the EU, with soundbites including ones from Raymond Blanc, the chef, and Niall Ferguson, a historian who argued that the impact of US culture on Europe would lead to closer integration within Europe.
- 8.56 debate continued, with additional opinion from "metric martyr" Steve Thornburn

Full transcripts of all these items are attached

Euro-sceptics and "withdrawers"(*) who took part in the Today sequences on withdrawal were:

*Christopher Gill, the Conservative MP who is stepping down at the next election because he feels so isolated through his withdrawal views,

*Lord Pearson of Rannoch, of Global Britain;

*Mike Fisher, MD of a Welsh company against the EU because of bad export experiences; Einer Steinsmors, of Norway;

*Nigel Farage of the UK Independence party,

Bill Cash MP, the Conservative, who is a leading back-bench Euro-sceptic

Charles Moore, editor of the Daily Telegraph

Conrad Black, proprietor of the Telegraph group, who believes that the UK's best economic interests would be served through the EU joining NAFTA

Edward Macmillan-Scott, the head of the Conservative group of MEPs

Lord Shore, a Labour Euro-sceptic who does not believe in withdrawal

Norman Stone, the academic.

Phil Gram, the US senator who believes that the UK should join NAFTA

Steve Thornburn (Metric Martyr)

Neither category

Mark Damazer, assistant director of News, BBC

Nick Sparrow ICM research

Danish MEP

Professor Neil Ferguson, who believes US influence is unifying Europe.

Nigel Payne, director of Institute for Social and Economics Research

Europhiles who took part were

Robin Cook foreign secretary

Frits Bolkestein, EU commissioner

Neil Kinnock, EU commissioner

Chris Patten, EU commissioner

Denis MacShane MP

Giles Radice MP

Ian Morris, UK MD of German company Linder

Raymond Seitz, former US ambassador to the UK

Jonathan Faull, chief spokesman for the commission

The coverage, through its selection of guests, editing of topics and questioning, resulted in the airing of the following topics from the Euro-sceptic/withdrawal camps:

- The findings of a specially-commissioned Today poll - reported in all the morning's bulletins and analysed by BBC correspondents Sarah Nelson and Gordon Carrera - which found that 71% remained against joining the Euro, and 30% wanted complete withdrawal. This also gave a framework for Today presenters to ask various politicians, mainly Europhiles, about their reaction. Notably, both Chris Patten and Robin Cook used the fact that the Today reports about the survey had omitted to say that the 30% figure was down from 34% the previous year to buttress arguments that despite the findings, public opinion was changing in their favour.
- A very brief five sentence sequence by Nigel Farage on the case for withdrawal. He said:

We'd be better off out. Better off economically, because we'd be able to do free trade deals with NAFTA, with the rest of the world. We'd save ourselves one and a quarter million pounds an hour, which we're currently pouring down the Euro drain. We'd be better off politically, because we'd be able to make laws that suit the British people, and not have to accept three thousand new pieces of law every year. But above all, we'd be better off because we'd get our self-confidence and respect back, because what's happening now is British Ministers are coming to Brussels begging, saying, 'Please sir, can we have some of our money back'.

He added later:

Well, I'm very pleased to hear that, Commissioner Kinnock, because Britain in Europe, the Labour Government, many Cabinet Ministers have been saying since 1997 that if Britain was to withdraw from the European Union, it would cost three million jobs. There is this idea that if we divorce ourselves from the political club, that somehow the rest of Europe wouldn't want to trade with us. Well, I'm very pleased to hear from you this morning that there is going to be no retaliation . . .

- The case for joining NAFTA, and allying the UK's economic interests more closely with America,

expounded at some length by Conrad Black, and to a lesser extent by Phil Gram and Edward Macmillan-Scott. It was typified by Mr Black 's point that:

My contention is that what we are inexorably advancing towards is a choice that has never been explicitly presented as one. We are in effect choosing Europe without the British public being aware of the fact that such a choice is being made. I think not. I think the answer to your question is that we could negotiate a new stance for ourselves in Europe. There would be no problem getting into NAFTA, that is absolutely clear from the leaders of the Congress and the Administration, and certainly the lesser countries in NAFTA, particularly the Canadians and the Mexicans that we would be welcome there. So that isn't the issue, the issue is what would the Europeans do if we sought such a status? They've now granted such a status to Mexico and a comparable status has been negotiated by such improbable geo-political powerhouses as Liechtenstein and Iceland, as well as Norway and Switzerland. It wouldn't be beyond the wit of the Foreign Office to do the same for us, only do a better job of it.

- The case that some sections of UK business felt that EU was too bureaucratic (through Sarah Nelson talking to Mike Fisher, the MD of a company caught up in EU red tape). This was not elaborated beyond a few basic soundbites
- Arguments that the BBC had been biased in its coverage of Europe through not exploring adequately either the case for withdrawal or renegotiation of the treaties, advanced by Charles Moore.
- Bill Cash arguing that if the UK renegotiated the key EU treaties, then by 2011 the position of the UK would be:

We have kept the Pound, our own taxes and defence, we've enhanced the special relationship with the United States by joining NAFTA, and we've expanded our trade with the rest of the world and the Commonwealth. In other European countries, businessmen, voters and politicians have seen our democratic lead and economic success, and have renegotiated their position and in Europe too. Britain has regained political respect and prestige throughout the world.

Lord Shore added in the same feature:

I think frankly the interests of the United States are far closer to those of the United Kingdom than the interests of France and Germany. That's not merely an obvious judgement about history: the last century was really devoted to the appalling business of waging war against principal European countries, and on both occasions, we had the enormous help of our American allies, and our Commonwealth allies. Now, you don't just scrub out history like that, it's too influential... The European Union is definitely, almost looking for a fight on a number of really quite important issues. Now, there could be occasions when they're on the right side as it were - but really one can't take that for granted. And the protectionism in Europe is really very considerable.

Analysis

In the event, very few of the guests were given the time or space to be able to put coherent arguments about the case for withdrawal. This looked to be the result of a series of deliberate editorial decisions. The exception related to Nigel Farage who was given five sentences to do so, and Charles Moore, who argued at reasonable length that the BBC had missed the importance of the issue altogether.

Edward Stourton's questioning of Europhiles was consistent and persistent: he kept the discussion firmly on what the arguments were against withdrawal. In so doing, he ensured that the guests such as Robin Cook kept firmly on track, and others, such as Edward Macmillan Scott, advanced clearly the Euro-sceptic perspective. Yet the firm approach further weakened the withdrawal perspective; because they were given more time, the case appeared weaker.

It was striking that the Conservative MP, Christopher Gill, for example, who was advocating withdrawal,

was not given any space to explain why, nor were his views tested. Equally, Phil Gram, said that there was a case for the UK joining NAFTA, but he did not have the space to advance why.

By contrast, the space given to those against withdrawal was substantial. Robin Cook, for example had the time to argue that the UK had played a very significant role at Nice, and had strengthened its position in the EU, substantially, that the government's position on Europe had held exactly firm and exactly the same since 1997, and that the Today opinion poll was an irrelevance because it had not mentioned that there had been a fall from 34% to 30% in those favouring withdrawal.

Chris Patten was also given substantial space to rebut the arguments by Conrad Black that Britain should join NAFTA, prefacing his remarks that Mr Black - one of the leading businessmen of his generation - was "charmingly eccentric" in his views; that a US congress inquiry that the UK would benefit only marginally by joining Natfa through higher industrial output, but, according to Mr Patten, would also suffer from lower foreign investment and job losses; that if the UK left the EU, it would be reduced to having the same influence as Iceland or Norway; and that the Today poll was flawed; and that Britain would remain strong by remaining in the EU.

Ambivalence

It was striking that the coverage of withdrawal, though clearly flagged, started on a note that suggested only that the UK was "a bit ambivalent" about the relationship with Europe (rather than saying, for example that opinion polls consistently found that one third wanted withdrawal and at least 70% were against joining the Euro). Sue MacGregor opened the coverage with this:

Now, here's a question: should Britain withdraw from Europe? None of the major political parties argues that we'd be better off out of the European Union, but consistently the polls do show that the voters are a bit ambivalent about the relationship. So, what would happen if we actually did pull out? For the next three days on this programme we'll be taking the proposition of withdrawal seriously. We'll look at the impact economically, politically, and culturally. And on Thursday morning, part of the programme will come live from Brussels. In the first of our three reports, Sarah Nelson has looked at the manufacturing industry to find out how the economy would fare if we left the Union.

For the opening sequence, this was rather mealy-mouthed. For example, "consistently the polls show a bit more than ambivalence about the relationship" does not quite square with that in recent polls, at least 30% - and often well towards 45% - favour withdrawal.

On the second day, Sue MacGregor was again rather circumspect:

This week on this programme, we're taking a look at what it could mean for Britain if she withdrew completely from the European Union. Some people suggest that she should, what would that sort of isolation mean? Well, in the second of three special reports for us, Sarah Nelson this morning looks at the political reality of life for Britain on the fringes of Europe.

This suggests that withdrawal from Europe would lead to "isolation", a strong word that suggests politically cut off - in foreign relations terminology the sort of word used to describe Russia's foreign policy between the wars. "On the fringes" of Europe is literally what would happen, but in this context it reinforces the impression that withdrawal would lead to lower, cut off status (see also below "negative language").

Together, this does not add up to outright negativity about the results of withdrawal. But it did not create the feeling that this was an argument that was particularly strong, nor did it explain to the viewer anything of the depth or weight of the withdrawal arguments - for example that there were groupings on both the left and right that supported withdrawal; that strong doubts were held also by the Green party, who were against EU approaches such as the CAP.

It was also of significance that the route chosen to tackle the withdrawal arguments did not dwell at all on the Euro-sceptic views that Europe itself as a project is too grand at best, and undemocratic, corrupt and self-seeking at worst.

How much more interesting an intro could have been if it had said boldly that there was a strong strand of opinion - endorsed by opinion polls which consistently suggested that around one third of the UK wanted to leave the EU - that the European project had gone awry, leading to the strong belief in some quarters that there was a need to re-assess continued membership.

BBC correspondent Gordon Carrera (1/2) tackled the issue of what it was like being a pro-withdrawal politician. The intro from Edward Stourton was as follows:

If you're a political strategist and you spot a position which attracts the support of a third of the electorate, you'd probably think quite hard about making the running with it. Well, as we reported earlier, our poll suggests that 30% of the British electorate want Britain out of Europe. So why isn't that on the menus offered by any of the main political parties? Gordon Carrera reports.

This was yet again, a relatively negative approach to the topic, suggesting almost that none of the main political parties had members who supported withdrawal. No attempt was made here or elsewhere to suggest how large the numbers of those supporting withdrawal was, or that there were members of all parties (eg Lord Stoddart and Christopher Gill), who favoured such a move.

Mr Carrera then made the point:

the position of wanting to pull out of the EU is a lonely one. Thirty percent of British voters may agree with him, but frustration at the failure of his fellow politicians to address the issue has led Conservative MP Christopher Gill to decide to step down at the next election.

CHRISTOPHER GILL: I spend many waking hours trying to work out why it is that this glimpse of the obvious haven't struck other politicians in the way it's struck the general public.

This, at best was a selectively chosen remark from Christopher Gill. It suggested unequivocally that politicians who supported withdrawal were being driven by their isolationist approach out of public life. This is patently not the case with other politicians, and as such this construction was misleading and over-generalised, a point reinforced by the fact that Mr Gill was the only mainstream politician (ie drawn from the three main parties) chosen to contribute on this topic through the three days of coverage.

Mr Carrera then suggested - in a deliberately drawn contrast - that Europhiles such as Denis McShane were more committed to their cause of greater integration.

Those MPs who are passionate about Europe take a different view. For them, it is the duty of politicians to face down anti-Europe sentiment in the public, or even simply to ignore it... opinion polls don't reflect that national interest, and I think leaving Europe is like leaving NATO, like leaving the World Trade Organisation, there are always some people out there who are in favour of it - but it simply isn't realistic. It's flat earth politics.

This soundbite chosen by Mr Carrera, had by its length and construction (deliberately engineered in the editing process) much more argument and conviction than Christopher Gill, and therefore suggested that those in favour of the Union had more substantive views. Not only that, but Mr Carrera appeared partly to endorse those views in his next statement:

Flat earth politics it may be, but there would seem to be votes in it.

He went on:

So why aren't more politicians willing to talk about withdrawal? Simple poll numbers can be misleading, according to Nick Sparrow, director of public opinion research organisation, ICM.

Mr Sparrow stated unilaterally that there were no votes in the withdrawal from Europe issue.

It's a very small part of a total vote that will go to a party that simply campaigns on one issue, that is to leave the EU. The issues, such as Health, Education and Law & Order are going to be the important things that determine the outcome of the election, particularly as Labour and the Conservatives both regard

Europe as something to be talked about after the election

His professional view maybe, but it was not strictly accurate (two weeks later, the EU ignited as a central election issue for both main parties), and almost certainly not the view of the whole polling profession, as was implied by its selection.

The problems with this piece was that - while the reporter considered a number of different viewpoints and issues on the withdrawal theme - the underlying tone and drift gave a misleading impression. It was clearly intended to suggest that "withdrawal" as such was both a lonely political argument to put and did not win votes. Christopher Gill apparently supported that viewpoint, but this was through a tightly edited soundbite given in a wider context. It also suggested that Europhiles were far more passionate in their views about EU membership. It did not have any countervailing opinion to the idea, floated by Denis McShane, that withdrawers were flat earthers - as extremist and hopeless a position it is possible to adopt. If anything, Mr Carrera appeared to come close to endorsing the view, even if what was intended was a throw-away line. It did not contain any argument from Mr Gill other than that he was on his own - and failed to give any estimate or weight to the real size within political circles of the withdrawal camp arguments (for example Global Britain, Christopher Booker, Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach or Lord Willoughby de Broke). It contained the view - without any contrasting approach - from one pollster that EU withdrawal, defined as a single issue, would not win votes.

Political reporters use their experience and understanding to develop arguments which reflect realities. In this case, what was delivered was slanted and gave a distorted perspective on the case for withdrawal.

Edward Stourton, introducing an interview with Sarah Nelson also on 1/2, considering the results of the Today poll on membership of the EU, said it indicated that "we were rather a Euro-sceptic lot". Ms Nelson confirmed that it did, before saying that 30% being against being in the EU was "worrying". Asked to clarify why, her answer was that because "*we've been in Europe now for almost thirty years, and a substantial portion of the British public really don't like being in Europe*".

Later, she added:

Yes, the Conservative Party feel they are onto a winner with this, William Hague's policy of 'not in the lifetime of the next Parliament' is clear blue water compared to the policy of the Labour Party and, you know, is exactly the sort of thing that the Tories will be pushing very hard. One has to say that actually, the pollsters do say it's health and education that do swing elections as votes, but this one will be fought very much on Europe, I think from the Tory point of view, so it'll be very interesting to see how many votes they'll be able to garner from that.

In this, Ms Nelson appeared to be indicating that the European issue wasn't that important because pollsters believed it didn't, as an issue, win elections. While the piece as a whole gave a significant airing of the poll findings, there was again a strong strand of opinion from a BBC reporter that the finding that 30% favoured withdrawal was not as important as it might have appeared - because "it didn't swing elections as votes".

This raises an important point about the dividing line between opinion and fact. Ms Nelson *appeared* to be dismissing a crucial element of the poll findings because "pollsters" believed that the EU issue in itself was not likely to sway the outcome of the next election. She was presumably referring to the Nick Sparrow comments included in the programme by Gordon Carrera. The issue is whether - and the listeners had no means of knowing - his views were representative or just themselves one viewpoint from one pollster. The impact of using the views without making it clear was that there was no doubt that the EU issue would be relatively unimportant in deciding the outcome of the next election.

This is what Mark Damazer, the BBC assistant director of news, said on the same programme:

But newspapers have editorials in which they can take a line which says that Britain should be in the Euro or Britain should be out of the Euro, should be more closely involved with a project in Europe or less closely involved. We can't do that. Our job is completely different, it's to make certain that a wide range of voices are heard on our relationship with the European Union.

Sarah Nelson wasn't going so far as expressing an editorial opinion, but the issue here is how far political

reporters can go in their selection of facts and still remain impartial. In this instance, Sarah Nelson suggested - based on what she said pollsters as a group believed - that the EU issue was not important enough to swing elections. Is that really objectively the case? And even if it was Ms Nelson's judgement that it was, in a piece supposedly seriously considering withdrawal, should not an alternative view have been put?

Sarah Nelson also appeared to be in complex waters when she took the issue on January 31 of what would happen in ten years' time if the UK left the EU. Here she chose William Cash to live the countervailing view to Giles Radice, who argued that:

The United Kingdom no longer has any say over European Union decisions, even though those decisions continue to affect us. The special relationship with the United States has become a hollow sham, as British politicians are virtually ignored in Washington. We've lost our place on the G8, our seat on the Security Council is threatened; and as our economic prosperity is faltering, we've been forced to cut back on defence spending, thus endangering our NATO position. The United Kingdom is almost universally known as The Weak Man of Europe.

The problem with choosing Mr Cash to rebut these sweeping contentions of what would happen if withdrawal happened was that he would not talk about withdrawal. This would seem a fairly strange approach. Was she really suggesting that no other MP or politician could be found? Sarah Nelson then used this refusal to fit in with her framework as an argument against the argument for withdrawal:

So, Britain the 'Weak Man of Europe', or enjoying restored international prestige? Back in 2001, and maybe it tells us something that even an arch Euro-sceptic like Bill Cash wasn't prepared to countenance withdrawal from the EU - even for the purposes of a fanciful illustration.

Again, Ms Nelson stops short of proffering a direct opinion - but the innuendo is clear; that it is hard to find anyone who could speak about withdrawal. This was strange journalism indeed. Ms Nelson presumably knew that there were MPs such as Christopher Gill and Lords Pearson, Harris and Stoddart prepared to talk about the issue, but clearly decided not to use them here, and then asserted that even arch Euro-sceptics would not speculate about withdrawal "even for a fanciful reconstruction".

*A further piece of interpretation came from Angus Roxburghe before the interview of Robin Cook by Edward Stourton at 8.15am on 1/2. This is what he said in full:

When Germany made a fairly undisguised bid for supremacy at the Nice summit last December France slapped it down, arguing that Franco-German parity was the very backbone of the European structure. Commentators talked of the end of the French/German axis. But have things really changed that much? The two countries might have different views of what federalism might entail, France may be wary of a German-inspired EU Constitution that might undermine the Nation State. But both countries continue to speak of themselves as being at the heart of all future progress in Europe. So where does that leave Britain? Well, under Tony Blair Britain is playing a bigger role in Europe. But as Today's opinion polls show, it does look differently at the marriage. Thirty per cent would happily sue for divorce. Most of the others don't want to give up our extramarital affair with America. And as long as Britain remains outside the biggest European project of all, the Euro, it can't expect to be at the heart of decision-making here. The time is, or could be, right for the French-German axis to make way for a new triangular one, with Britain a key player, but the longer it self-excludes itself from major projects, the closer we get to joining that dreaded "second tier" in Europe. Berlin and Paris want us in - they're waiting with open arms. Perhaps that's what's scares us so much.

The key phrases here are "Britain is playing a much bigger role" (though that assessment would surely be questioned in some quarters) and "dreaded second tier". The construction suggests that unless Britain stopped "self-excluding itself" from "major projects" (presumably meaning membership of the Euro), it would be relegated to the second tier. This clearly implied that Britain would suffer it did not engage more fully in Europe.

In the interview that followed with Robin Cook, he was allowed by Edward Stourton to switch the debate to his own terms. He effectively ignored the issue of 70% being against the Euro, and instead moved the focus to the 4% fall in the number saying that they wanted to withdraw. Edward Stourton, unusually, failed to push the debate back into the areas that he wanted to pin Mr Cook into explaining. Robin Cook effectively relegated all of the findings of the poll to unimportance (we aren't asking them to join the Euro now and

53% for continued membership against 30% for withdrawal would be a major victory). Even by the standards of government spin, this was Houdinism and he was allowed to get away with it. The points revealed by the survey were that a growing number was against the Euro, and that the overall drift of polls indicated that the view was hardening, and that despite the government pledging closer integration with Europe, and 30 years on since membership, at least one third of the electorate still favoured withdrawal.

Part 2

This section of analysis is by project researcher Andrew Jubb. Some of his work overlaps the points made above - but is more interesting as a result.

The Sarah Nelson Reports (AJ)

Beginning on the 30th January 2000, the Today Programme broadcast a three-day package of special reports looking at the issue of British withdrawal from the European Union. Each report was compiled and presented by Sarah Nelson, and sought to assess the consequences should Britain decide to leave the EU. Sue MacGregor introduced the three-item package as follows:

'Now, here's a question: should Britain withdraw from Europe? None of the major political parties argues that we'd be better off out of the European Union, but consistently the polls do show that the voters are a bit ambivalent about the relationship. So, what would happen if we actually did pull out? For the next three days on this programme we'll be taking the proposition of withdrawal seriously.'

The structural decision to cover the issue of Withdrawal from Europe over a series of three features is to be commended. One of the key concerns aroused by the previous monitoring project (covering the output of Today in May-June 2000) was how the structural constraints of the programme - with an average feature length of five minutes - might affect listener understanding in debates as complex and multifaceted as Europe. It was felt that in certain instances the European question suffered as a result of these time constraints, and therefore splitting items into smaller, more manageable pieces - rather than attempting to deal with too much information at once - is a practise to be encouraged.

Similarly, unlike previous European coverage delivered by the programme, the Sarah Nelson items were generally well paced and unhurried. The use of music and situation-specific sound reduced the word-per minute count considerably, thus affording listeners greater opportunity to contemplate the ideas being expressed.

The three reports are examined in turn and an assessment made as to whether or not this central question was satisfactorily addressed and whether indeed the programme did take the proposition seriously.

1. The Economic Impact of Withdrawal

In her first report, Sarah Nelson considered the prospect of economic withdrawal from the EU. The pro-European Managing Director of a German-owned hydraulics firm opened the debate, with a point that was succinct and fairly eloquently made:

IAN MORRIS: I think even the word 'important' is rather underplaying it. I think it's essential. The world is breaking down into large currency blocks with power, and we've got to be part of it. To pretend that we can stay outside is a nonsense - if we consider Great Britain to be a power in the manufacturing world.

Yet the riposte which then was chosen from the Chairman of a West Midlands tanker firm was striking in its lack of substance. It was a 'non-argument', offering no real reasoning or justification for withdrawal.

MIKE FISHER: The straightforward benefits for Wale Tankers in Europe are . . . there aren't any.

The rest of Fisher's opposition rested upon his past unfavourable experience with French Tanker import regulations and his company's past failed attempts 'to take advantage of the single market in France'. It was not made clear as to whether these were EU regulations or French Governmental regulations - and ultimately Fisher's disillusionment with Europe seemed to stem purely from his own negative business experiences, rather than any secure ideological position.

Here we see a common problem. By using 'real life' voices to illustrate debates, arguments can be too specific to a contributor's personal experiences, and broader issues not articulated successfully. In this case, a contributor describing a very specific set of business circumstances was positioned as the voice of withdrawal, against contributors speaking in wider ideological terms. Despite Nelson's own attempt to explain and bolster his position, his argument was left sounding somewhat anecdotal.

Clearly, the Today Programme cannot be held directly responsible for the strength or quality of a particular contributor's reasoning. Yet this was an edited item, and there is an obvious necessity to achieve a *qualitative balance* between speakers on a given subject. It seems clear that editorial decisions were made on the choice of speaker and the section of the interview selected for broadcast. The question must therefore be raised as to why particular individuals are chosen to contribute if their perspective is insubstantial or adds little to a debate. While contributions from the general public are certainly valuable, it seemed peculiar to open a three-day package supposedly examining the case for withdrawal in such a way: The programme focused in on the minutiae of a debate, when perhaps an interview with economists would have presented listeners with a better understanding of the wider picture.

Also puzzling was that an item that purported to have Withdrawal as its central theme managed to open with the viewpoint of a Euro-enthusiast. This decision had a strong repercussion on the overall dynamic of Nelson's first report. With the pro-European position being presented strongly at the outset, there was a tangible sense that the Withdrawal argument was having to 'catch-up' throughout the rest of the piece. It is also worth noting that the next pro-European voice - Nigel Payne from the National Institute for Economic and Social Research - was not even balanced with a supporter of withdrawal. After he stressed the benefits of Britain remaining within the EU, it was left to Sarah Nelson to offer the counter-argument in her commentary.

The second half of the report constituted an assessment of alternative trading arrangements, namely Norway's European Economic Area agreement, and the North American Free Trade Area. The first of these proposals seemed somewhat unusual from a Withdrawal perspective, as Nelson explained:

For British Euro-sceptics though, [the EEA] might not be acceptable. As a part of the Single Market, Norway still has to accept Brussels's directives.

Although the notion of joining NAFTA is perhaps gaining currency amongst Euro-sceptics, the item had little opportunity to explain the possible arrangement in detail. Drawing these two 'replacement' ideas into the debate - with, presumably, their own set of unanswered economic, political and constitutional questions - served only to cloud the issues surrounding Withdrawal further, rather than clarifying them.

2. The Political Impact of Withdrawal

The next item (on 31/1) was heralded as 'a look at the political reality for Britain if she withdrew completely from the European Union'.

The negativity of the intro to this piece which spoke in terms of an isolated UK on the fringes of Europe is analysed both above and again later on. Again, within the piece itself, the ant-Withdrawal case was delivered first. Listeners were initially presented with the voices of two unnamed politicians, who served to emphasise the fact, in Nelson's words, that the notion of withdrawal is 'so off the map, it is barely registering at all.'

MP ONE: No, I don't think that's in the realm of practical politics, it's neither necessary, nor desirable.

MP TWO: We have so many commitments, future commitments between us and the members. You cannot just walk away.

It is important to remember here that the poll commissioned by ICM for the Today Programme, which revealed 30% of the public in favour of leaving the European Union was not unveiled until the following morning. It would seem likely that the results of this survey would have been available for some time previously, yet by withholding the results until the special edition from Brussels, the programme allowed politicians free rein in their dismissal the Withdrawal argument. If the poll results had been mentioned that morning, then this opening section would have been much more balanced. It would also have gone further towards explaining that although the idea may be 'off the map' as far as mainstream party policy is concerned, the idea does have support from a large section of the voting public and other minority parties.

The main part of the report began with a look into the future, with a mock Today bulletin from 2011 considering what life might be like had Britain left the European Union some seven years previously. Labour MP Giles Radice began by painting a bleak picture of Britain as 'The Weak Man of Europe', a country that had lost its place on the G8 Security Council and whose position within NATO was under threat. The Conservative Bill Cash then offered an alternative perspective, but clearly he was not advocating a complete withdrawal from the Union, but rather of Britain 'renegotiating the European treaties, and staying in the Single Market'. As Sarah Nelson remarked:

It tells us something that even an arch Euro-sceptic like Bill Cash wasn't prepared to countenance withdrawal from the EU - even for the purposes of a fanciful illustration.

What is extraordinary here is that the first four speakers were all actually against Withdrawal. Over the course of the three reports, the programme seemed at great pains to stress that the Withdrawal debate is not a mainstream one, and this was the perfect opportunity to bring other, less-often heard opinions into the discussion. There are a number of well-known voices and parties that favour withdrawal, but instead the debate travelled along established party political lines: the Labour pro-European meets the Conservative Euro-sceptic. It was disappointing to see the chance to present a strong case - or any case - for Withdrawal was lost somewhere along the way.

The next section of the feature commenced with yet another pro-European voice, American Ambassador to London, Raymond Seitz, who stated that Britain's special relationship with Washington would be affected by withdrawal. More Euro-sceptics, including Lord Shore, were brought in to contest this point, and explain that in their view Britain has more in common with the USA than with Continental Europe; but it seems remarkable that the report did not include any speakers putting forward a specific argument for Britain leaving the EU completely.

3. The Cultural Impact of Withdrawal

The final report seemed to bear little resemblance to the original intentions of the package: 'the cultural impact of Withdrawal'. Indeed, Sarah Nelson herself seemed to hastily rearrange the report's central premise in her live introduction to the piece:

Yes, I mean this is a question of cultural identity. Obviously, in Europe, now you have the growth of the European Institutions, the new elite, if you like - but how far is that actually filtering down to the man and woman in the street in Britain? And do they identify with the European project? So really, we posed the question, where does British identity lie?

Clearly, 'the cultural impact of withdrawal' and 'where does British identity lie?' are two completely separate questions, and by focusing on the latter, the first was neatly sidestepped.

The report began from the set of a new British film based around the Manchester music scene between 1976 and to 1992. As in the earlier report on Economic Withdrawal, this focusing on specifics meant there was little chance to open up a wider debate. Interviews with the film's producer and director revealed a concern with American influence and world markets, which left Sarah Nelson wrestling to guide the feature

back on track:

So far, so good - a thriving sense of British identity in the film world that is balancing the influence of the United States. Perhaps it's just as well, because everybody else in Europe is feeling the pull of the USA.

Yet the two film makers also mentioned three very successful British films - *The Full Monty*, *Trainspotting* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* - and their own production is concerned with two of the most globally influential youth cultures of the last three decades: punk and acid house. It seemed strange then, that the report seemed to shy away from offering these as evidence of cultural strength or autonomy. Instead, Nelson took up the theme of American influence on European culture, and how this might eventually make the process of European integration smoother.

The emphasis for the rest of the piece was on the cross-fertilisation of British and European culture, with a comment on the Deutsche Bank's decision to use English as its official language, and a account of how Continental cuisine has apparently changed British eating habits. As she introduced Chef Raymond Blanc, Sarah Nelson commented:

When it comes to food, we in Britain have had our attitudes transformed - so these days we actually care about the quality of what we eat. And that's a truly Continental trait.

Of course, the reasoning behind this is somewhat suspect in itself. The change in British eating habits could be attributed to any number of influences: for example, the phenomenon of the celebrity television chef, the wider availability of foreign travel, more prevalent health advice and information, the economic influences of the large supermarket chains. Furthermore, cultural influence is now global, in this era of mass communication and global capitalism, cultural products cross borders with a greater ease than ever before, but no contributor was on hand to offer this alternative perspective.

In retrospect, it seems clear to see that any argument on the cultural impact of withdrawal would have greatly favoured Britain leaving the EU. The European Union is primarily an economic and political project, and as such it would be perverse to suggest that withdrawal from the EU would affect British culture in any discernible way. It was immediately apparent that there were no contributors within the piece who were supportive of withdrawal, and by shifting the report to address the Americanisation of European culture, important elements of the debate were completely ignored.

Negative Language and the Europe Debate (AJ)

While it could be suggested that language itself is seldom neutral, there were times during the week-long monitoring period, where phrases and comments made by the Today team showed a clear lack of impartiality with regards to the Euro-sceptic or Withdrawal perspectives. On a number of occasions, words and phrases were used which serve to reinforce particular negative concepts and ideas. It might perhaps seem pedantic to look at the phraseology used within the Today Programme in such detail, but the use of emotive phrases can help strengthen prejudices and perhaps, conceivably, sway public perception of an issue

A notable example appeared on the 31st January, in the introduction by Sue MacGregor to the second of Sarah Nelson's reports:

This week on this programme, we're taking a look at what it could mean for Britain if she withdrew completely from the European Union. Some people suggest that she should, what would that sort of isolation mean? Well, in the second of three special reports for us, Sarah Nelson this morning looks at the political reality of life for Britain on the fringes of Europe.

Central here are the twin notions of 'isolation' and 'Britain on the fringes of Europe'. Both are negative concepts, evoking images of exclusion and loneliness. If we consider for a moment substituting these words with more positive ones: 'what would this sort of *independence* mean?' / 'the political reality of life for *an autonomous Britain*' we can see immediately how a different mental image is created.

Had the piece been written as follows (in line with ideas all thrown up and covered by the programme), the

impact would have been much different:

This week on the programme, we are examining what it would mean for Britain if she withdrew from the European Union. Opinion polls are consistent in suggesting that at least 30% of the population believe that withdrawal is the solution to many of our current problems - because of fears - rightly or wrongly - of federalism and of being overwhelmed by the European superstate. Sarah Nelson looks this morning at the prospects for Britain if it re-asserted its autonomy from Europe and moved to forge more trade alliances with the rest of the world.

The negativity of Ms Nelson's earlier passage is also accentuated by Ms MacGregor's use of the word 'she' - in personifying of Britain, "her" words become much more emotive and imbue the country with human feelings and emotions. It is worth remarking that the practice of calling Britain 'she' is actually very uncommon within the programme - it appears not to have been used in any other reports in the monitored week, nor over the course of the nine-week monitoring period undertaken between May and July 2000. It is curious therefore that it is used in this report.

The following day, 1st February, the programme revealed the findings of the ICM poll that it had commissioned. Edward Stourton questioned Sarah Nelson on the findings:

EDWARD STOURTON: And what about some of these other things - there's this stubborn third-ish roughly who believe we should actually leave the European Union.

SARAH NELSON: That's very worrying long-term, because you know we've been in . . .

EDWARD STOURTON: Worrying for whom?

Mr Stourton was quick to pick up on Ms Nelson's impartiality - the thirty percent of voters wanting to leave the EU completely could only be considered worrying for pro-Europeans - although Ms Nelson herself never directly responded to his question 'worrying for whom?'. This interjection was commendable on Stourton's part, showing an awareness of how language can so easily give a particular slant to a report. Yet by bringing our attention to Ms Nelson, it is easy to miss the point he himself makes - talking of a 'stubborn third-ish', which, arguably, has its own set of negative connotations.

Although the programme's guests and interviewees often use emotive language to strengthen their arguments, the presenters and correspondents need to offer an unbiased approach. The following example (1st February, report on the Today opinion poll) demonstrates how easily this line can be crossed, and by simple repetition an interviewee's viewpoint can suddenly appear to also become that of the BBC:

DENIS McSHANE: There are always some people out there who are in favour of it (referring to withdrawal) - but it simply isn't realistic. It's flat earth politics.

GORDON CARRERA: Flat earth politics it may be, but there would seem to be votes in it. So why aren't more politicians willing to talk about withdrawal?

The phrase 'flat-earthers' encourages a stereotypical notion of those in favour of withdrawal holding old-fashioned, conservative and reactionary sets of values, which - as has been demonstrated elsewhere - may not necessarily be the case.

How much more refreshing and reassuring it could have been to those who think the BBC is biased on this topic, if Mr Carrera had instead said, in picking up Denis McShane's remarks:

Euro-enthusiasts often use such negative language to describe their opponents, but the fact remains that the opinion polls suggest there are votes to be had in withdrawal issues...

This type of motif recurs in a report by Angus Roxborough on the 1st February. Here Europe is 'driving

forward', while the forces of Euro-scepticism are 'hampering' the EU's 'single greatest project'.

Angus Roxborough: There's a sort of triangular relationship which will drive Europe forward, hampered of course by the fact that Britain isn't in the single greatest project that's going on at all in Europe at the moment: the Single Currency.

There was also an interesting incident of the pro-withdrawal argument being somewhat underplayed, by Sue MacGregor in an introduction to the first of Sarah Nelson's reports on withdrawal (30th January)

None of the major political parties argues that we'd be better off out of the European Union, but consistently the polls do show that the voters are a bit ambivalent about the relationship.

Although at this point in the week, the programme had not revealed the results of the ICM opinion poll, previous surveys had shown similar results. The phrase 'a bit ambivalent', therefore, very significantly understates both the numbers involved, and the strength of feeling on the matter.

Conclusion

Today clearly made a special attempt to consider the issue of withdrawal. A reporter was commissioned specially to work on three special reports, a wide variety of figures drawn from many parts of the political spectrum were interviewed, and Edward Stourton anchored an unusually prominent section of the programme which brought the word "withdrawal" into the equation many times.

But did these strands genuinely cover the issues involved?

One of the most important considerations in answering this question is where the voices on withdrawal came from. In the event, just three of the many Euro-sceptics featured were in fact in favour of *withdrawal*. The key Tory interviewed - Edward Macmillan-Scott specifically felt that those who favoured withdrawal were "extreme". Only Nigel Farage of UKIP was given brief space through a live interview to marshal some of the arguments in favour of withdrawal. As the argument above establishes, the two others - Christopher Gill and Lord Pearson of Rannoch - were edited back to soundbites intended to support the drift of the pieces the items were contained within rather than to explore in any detail what they thought about *withdrawal* and why it was - to them - so important an issue. .

Of the Euro-sceptics, Conrad Black and William Cash were given reasonable space to explain why Britain would benefit from a reduced role in Europe, closer ties with the US and a reined back European Union.

Important airing was given to the fact that there was an argument for membership of NAFTA.

Edward Stourton's questioning also established that Frits Bolkestein believed that withdrawal from the UK would have little impact economically on the UK in terms of job losses and free trade, an important point against repeated claims from Europhiles that delays in joining the Euro alone was costing many manufacturing jobs.

But on the other side of the coin, there was much in the withdrawal case that was conspicuous by its absence. There was no attempt to engage in topics important to those who espouse withdrawal, for example, whether federalism was the real agenda of the European project, or how the EU operated in relation to its overseas policy and trade protectionism or about controversial areas such as the operation of CAP, the fisheries policy, or about how investment by the US in the UK is at record levels. There was no attempt to dissect how trade patterns and defence relationships would actually change - not just with the US but also with the Commonwealth - if the UK left the EU.

Equally, there was no attempt to go out and about to capture outside the political establishment the voices and opinions of the 30% who said that they were in favour of the withdrawal and the 70% who wanted not to join the Euro.

It was also the case that Europhiles were given abundant space to rebut the withdrawal arguments and to express concerns about the findings of the opinion poll. Robin Cook and Chris Patten were given more space than anyone else in their set-piece interviews, and though they were questioned relatively probingly and firmly about their views, there was no equal treatment of a Euro-sceptic or withdrawer. In this context, it would surely have been fairer - to meet Mr Damazer's goal - to have done a straight interview with someone similar to Nigel Farage, and also someone who could put the economic arguments, such as Ruth Lea of the IOD.

The overall impact was that while withdrawal as an issue is on the political agenda, it was espoused only by extremists, and would not affect the outcome of the general election.

Clearly, this was an area of debate being engaged. The danger is that in boxing withdrawal as a special event worthy of such special treatment it will be regarded as having been "done". Further, the treatment did not allow for a full airing - as was implied in the programme writing - of the issues surrounding withdrawal. It was much more a re-rehearsal of some, but not many, of the mainstream Euro-sceptic arguments. As such, what was promised was not delivered. Mark Damazer's aim of allowing the expression of a wide variety of opinions and voices, in the event, came down to no more than a croak or two from those who really want withdrawal.

This was compounded by the attitudes and stance of the BBC correspondents covering this issue. Sarah Nelson, the compiler of the series of three special reports, assembled some of the main Euro-sceptic arguments, but chose not to include in her editing the views who actually did support withdrawal. Her writing, while not falling into the category of editorial comment, appeared to indicate that withdrawal was so far off the political spectrum that it was almost impossible to find those who would argue for it.

For Today - and the BBC - the conundrum therefore remains of how to properly cover the debate about Europe. There is a substantial strand of opinion particularly outside Parliament, but also within it, that favours withdrawal. Despite Robin Cook's assertions, that number remains remarkably consistent in the 30-40% band. At the moment, little articulation is given to those views. On this showing, it appears that those who espouse withdrawal will have real difficulty ever achieving an effective platform on one of the nation's main arenas of political debate.

Today remains centrally focused on the views of the politicians at Westminster, and on this showing, hardly capable of moving outside it.

Appendix 1 - Widening the Debate on Europe

'The BBC could do worse than to help promote the vision and idealism of this country's deserved place as leader in the European family of nations, as opposed to continuing to reinforce the sentiments of the isolationist Little Englander.' (Listeners Letters, Today, Saturday 3rd February 2001)

Over the course of the last decade, the British debate on Europe has been divided to a large extent along party political lines. Of course, there are voices of dissent within each of the main parliamentary parties, but generally, the Labour Government has adopted a pro-European stance *'in principle'*, while the Conservative Opposition has colonised the Euro-sceptic position, currently mainly defined as extreme caution over the Euro and a desire to renegotiate elements of the main treaties. The problem is, of course, that there are other ideological issues at play in the debate on Europe, issues that are not addressed fully in the arena of Westminster politics. Therefore, each time the Today programme chooses to place a Conservative Euro-sceptic viewpoint against that of a Labour pro-European argument, this dynamic becomes reinforced and

eventually, one could argue, entrenched.

The key difficulty here is that the news media has too readily entangled the Euro-sceptic and Withdrawal opinion with a broader right-wing ideology. William Hague has successfully drawn attention to his anti-Single Currency stance, but on many occasions other strands of Conservative ideology have been woven into the debate, almost imperceptibly. Thus, many people – including the listener whose letter appears at the beginning of this section – may believe that Euro-scepticism is synonymous with a 'Little Englander' approach, and there are no other avenues available save this one. It seems apparent that the anti-EU argument has become enmeshed with issues surrounding asylum seekers, metric measurements, 'saving the pound'. Perhaps more importantly, the perspective can be readily linked – particularly by opponents such as Denis McShane - to a general distrust of anything foreign (one thinks, for example, of the excerpt of Thatcher's speech blaming many of Britain's problems on Europe, which was replayed as part of a Sarah Nelson report during the monitoring period).

This in itself raises obvious problems. Primarily there is a difficulty for those people who do not identify with the sections of Conservative ideology detailed above. For a proportion of voters, to take a Euro-sceptic position would be akin to aligning themselves with right-wing policies, and would therefore be unacceptable. Consequently, it is essential that the news media recognise this, and demonstrate through their choice of speakers that there are other ideologies that favour withdrawal from the EU, and that these ideologies do not all have a basis on the political right.

In an interview with Edward Stourton on 1st February, the Assistant Director of News at the BBC, Mark Damazer, stressed the importance of a broad range of opinion being aired:

Our job is . . . to make certain that a wide range of voices are heard on our relationship with the European Union.

Yet during the monitoring week, this 'wide range of voices' was actually conspicuous by its absence. There are of course left-wing perspectives on Withdrawal from Europe, but any listener to the debates featured on Today could be forgiven for remaining unaware of this fact. Throughout the debate, Today reiterated that the Withdrawal debate is not a mainstream political issue - yet the vast majority of those asked to speak on the subject were mainstream politicians.

In a week where it might have legitimately invited minority parties to join the debate, this was extremely disappointing. It would have been interesting, for instance, to hear the views of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, even though it has no parliamentary representation. Their case for British withdrawal from the EU rests upon a completely different set of beliefs to those of the Conservatives. For example, the party believes the European Union's policies are always used against the interests of working people; that the European Common Market has done little to protect jobs as was promised when Britain joined; and that the EU is an 'exclusive capitalist club'. Similarly the Green Party, which does have two MEPs, believes that the EU promotes the goals of multinational corporations rather than real people; operates using the unsustainable economics of free trade; and the way in which the EU serves vested political and economic interests.

Speakers from either of these camps would have added a new dimension to the debate, as indeed would any of the Labour MPs, academics or economists who share a similar perspective. It seemed strange then, in a week that the programme pledged 'to take the prospect of Withdrawal seriously', the vast majority of those who *were* forthright in their support of Euro-scepticism came to the issue from a rightwing position.

To conclude, it would be foolish to assume that the thirty or so percent of people in favour of Withdrawal come solely from the right of the political spectrum. Until this is taken into account by broadcasters it will be difficult to achieve any broadening of the European debate at all.

Appendix 2

Extracts covering Euro-sceptic/withdrawal arguments

MIKE FISHER: The straightforward benefits for Wale Tankers in Europe are . . . there aren't any.

SN: With ninety percent of his sales at home, perhaps Mike Fisher can think that Britain can go it alone. But he says he's not a little-Englander, past attempts to take advantage of the single market in France have failed, proving to him how pointless Europe is.

MF: The French had, at that time, a pretty odd set of regulations that made it very difficult to import tankers into France. And we fell foul of those regulations, and it cost us a lot of money.

SN: For Mike Fisher then, coming out of Europe would mean less interference and bureaucracy, for Ian Morris, withdrawal would damage foreign investment and undermine manufacturing.

Then Sarah Nelson herself:

SN: Hugely successful, though very different economically to the UK, Norway is able to enjoy the trading benefits of the single market through its membership of the European Economic Area - the EEA. The leader of the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Committee, Einer Steinzmous, says there are none of the disadvantages of full membership of the European Union.

EINER STEINZMOUS: Of course, being a member, you can be in the decision-shaping process, but the EEA agreement on the other side gives us the opportunity to influence at the forefront of the process. So I don't think that the advantages of going in are so very big compared to having the EEA agreement.

SN: For British Euro-sceptics though, this might not be acceptable. As a part of the single market, Norway still has to accept Brussels's directives. Another way forward is needed.

Then:

SN: Across the Atlantic, the election of a new President heralds a new move in Washington, reviving hopes that this will pave the way for Britain to join the North American Free Trade Area - NAFTA. The republican champion of such a move is Senator Phil Gram.

PHIL GRAM: According to Lisa Rice, who is one of the Presidents closest advisors, said - and I quote - "Britain is probably our closest ally in the world, but were the British to come and say as a unified voice, 'we'd like to join NAFTA', I don't think there would be any objections, and I certainly agree with that.

SN: Joining NAFTA is attractive to those who believe a high-growth, free trade area is preferable to a lower-growth and more protectionist Europe. But it doesn't answer the big question: does Britain need to be in a trading block at all? There've been huge strides in opening up foreign markets to international trade, and surely globalisation makes it easier to go it alone? According to Professor Norman Stone, the lesson of history is that trading blocks don't work.

NORMAN STONE: That sort of thing made a certain amount of sense in the 1930s, and I don't suppose there was too much of an alternative, but it didn't work particularly well. In fact, World Trade didn't really

recover its levels of 1913 until 1951.

SN: So, is unfettered capitalism then, the way forward? At Wale Tankers, Mike Fisher would find it much more preferable.

MF: Anywhere where there's free trade I'm entirely for, and if Europe was just about free trade I would have a very different argument.

SN: At the moment, withdrawal from Europe is still not being taken very seriously. Although economically it would have clear downsides, Mike Fisher believes it's not quite as unattractive as some pro-Europeans would make out.

Her second piece on 31/1, opened with this statement about withdrawal:

Hold a meeting to discuss the limits of European integration, and the political parties turn up in their droves. But ask them over withdrawal over wine, and it's clear that this is one subject that it so off the map, it is barely registering at all.

BILL CASH (visualising what would happen in ten years' time if the treaties had been renegotiated): We have kept the Pound, our own taxes and defence, we've enhanced the special relationship with the United States by joining NAFTA, and we've expanded our trade with the rest of the world and the Commonwealth. In other European countries, businessmen, voters and politicians have seen our democratic lead and economic success, and have renegotiated their position and in Europe too. Britain has regained political respect and prestige throughout the world.

Lord Shore: I think frankly the interests of the United States are far closer to those of the United Kingdom than the interests of France and Germany. That's not merely an obvious judgement about history: the last century was really devoted to the appalling business of waging war against principle European countries, and in both occasions, we had the enormous help of our American allies, and our Commonwealth allies. Now, you don't just scrub out history like that, it's too influential.

SN: Lord Shore isn't alone.

LADY THATCHER: Well, if I dare say it, and I'm told I have to be careful what I say - and I don't like it [*laughter*]

SN: Mrs Thatcher went much further a few years ago.

LADY THATCHER: In my lifetime, all our *problems* have come from mainland Europe, and all the solutions have come from the English-speaking nations across the world.

Lord Shore: The European Union is definitely, almost looking for a fight on a number of really quite important issues. Now, there could be occasions when they're on the right side as it were - but really one can't take that for granted. And the protectionism in Europe is really very considerable.

Professor Neil Ferguson (on 1/2): The institutions like EMU, the Single Currency, might make the cultural process harder, by creating all kinds of sources of conflict and division that weren't there before. And one has to remember that the process of monetary integration was happening anyway, just in the sense that your plastic works just as well in Florence as they work in Edinburgh. And the whole process of creating a Single Currency, I suspect, may make more difficulties than it actually solves in the process of European integration.

IN the final half hour of 1/2

NIGEL FARAGE: We'd be better off out. Better off economically, because we'd be able to do free trade deals with NAFTA, with the rest of the world. We'd save ourselves one and a quarter million pounds an hour, which we're currently pouring down the Euro drain. We'd be better off politically, because we'd be

able to make laws that suit the British people, and not have to accept three thousand new pieces of law every year. But above all, we'd be better off because we'd get our self-confidence and respect back, because what's happening now is British Ministers are coming to Brussels begging, saying, 'Please sir, can we have some of our money back'.

And later in the same sequence:

NF: Well, I'm very pleased to hear that Commissioner Kinnock, because Britain in Europe, the Labour Government, many Cabinet Ministers have been saying since 1997 that if Britain was to withdraw from the European Union, it would cost three million jobs. There is this idea that if we divorce ourselves from the political club, that somehow the rest of Europe wouldn't want to trade with us. Well, I'm very pleased to hear from you this morning that there is going to be no retaliation . . .

NK: (*Interrupting*) That's dodging the main question . . .

ES: No, let him finish

NF: But I would say, had the question been asked, had the poll said, do you want to leave the European Union and replace it with a genuine free trade agreement, I suggest to you the figure would have been much higher than thirty percent.

Later still, a question from Edward Stourton:

ES: Now, Nigel Farage, do you think that the Government is now hiding behind the economic tests, that they have been met as we've just heard there.

NF: I mean, the point is surely, even if we converge, what happens in a couple of year's time when we *diverge*? I mean just look at the situation that's happening in Ireland today. Ireland is out of cycle with the rest of the European Union, and we've now got the European Commission, bullying, threatening. . . .

Earlier there was a discussion as to whether the BBC had been biased in its treatment of European issues:

ES: Come a new decade and the New Statesmen began to look dated. The ideas of the 80s were more likely to be found in the pages of its rightwing rival The Spectator, with Charles Moore at the helm. He fought what he says was a lonely battle against the orthodox view on Europe. He charges the BBC with a dereliction of duty.

CHARLES MOORE: The assumption was that European integration was a good thing, and people who didn't see it that way must be somehow fanatical or extreme.

ES: And was it your view that that was something unique to the BBC or that that was something it shared in common with the media in general?

CM: Much more characteristic of the BBC than of the print media. I think it's generally a problem with a semi-nationalised industry, as the BBC is, to respond quickly to public feeling. So that, the newspapers - I'm not claiming a greater collective honesty by Fleet Street than by the BBC, but I do think newspapers are more responsive.

ES: Every so often there's a broadside against the BBC that really catches the headlines. You may remember Lord Pearson of Rannoch and the grapes he fired at this programme just before Christmas.

LORD PEARSON: Just listening to programmes over a period of time, there's a very strong feeling in the Euro-realist camp in this country that the BBC was not playing it fair, that the BBC had made up its mind that the European Union was a wonderful thing, and the quicker we got into the currency the better.

ES: The next big Euro tests for the BBC will come with the General Election and perhaps not so very long afterwards, a referendum on joining the Single Currency. Charles Moore, now editor of the Telegraph, still doesn't trust the BBC to ask the right questions.

CM: In a way, the whole European issue is a very simple one, which is to do with who governs you, and that issue tends not to be properly put forward by the BBC, it tends to avoid, you know the famous expression, 'the elephant in the room,' - the elephant's so big in the room that you don't notice it's there. The BBC will ask quite difficult questions about Europe, but more technical ones, more short-term ones, and somehow avoid the big one. That I expect to happen again when we have a referendum campaign