



# The lessons of the French and Dutch referendum victories

**Marc Glendening revels in the richly deserved discomfort of Denis MacShane and his ilk**

THERE ARE MANY honourable advocates of greater European political integration, but Denis MacShane isn't one of them. It is to him that the great recent *non/nee* victories for democracy in France and Holland should be dedicated. Britain's sacked former Europe minister epitomises the worst characteristics of the Pan European political elite: arrogant and disingenuous. The outbreak of people power we are now seeing across our continent is a huge symbolic, as well as political, defeat for the neo-feudalist system of government that MacShane and his political insider tribe have been trying to impose upon ordinary Europeans. The cocky smirk of those who, like Denis, really believed that tomorrow belonged to them is fading fast.

These extraordinary referendum triumphs also, and this is one of the key repercussions for Britain in particular, destroy at a stroke one of the key lines of attack employed by the New Labour elite against EU-scepticism. Namely, that those of us who have had the temerity to attack the EU project, are, to quote the former minister in a now infamous newspaper interview, "motivated by a xenophobic hatred against Germans or the French". Apparently we "validate a kind of Orwellian hate language against other European countries" (*Daily Telegraph*, 07/08/04). It would be interesting to know if Mr MacShane is now also applying this glib nonsense - be it with obvious modification - to the millions of French voters who voted *non*?

The central strategic aim of this Euro-McCarthyite, "xenophobes under the bed", offensive has been to get all sophisticated, politically moderate and younger people to automatically switch off from EU-sceptical arguments. MacShane's hope was that we would be culturally tainted as politically unclean in exactly the same way Senator McCarthy aspired to smear the entirety of the American left as "reds under the bed", communist fellow travellers, in the 1950s. MacShane wanted Middle Britain to believe that opposition to the Pan-European project was limited to a few ageing racists and that it was, by definition, right-wing and "little Englander" to oppose new transfers of power to

Brussels. Think again, Denis. Now we have definitive proof that millions of other Europeans feel exactly the same way as the natural, if so far, silent majority in Britain. What is more, in both France and Holland it was only among voters over sixty years old that the "yes" side won. The younger the voters, the bigger was the *non/nee* vote. What is more, in both countries a majority of those rejecting the EU Constitution were left-wingers. In one fell swoop EU-scepticism has become legitimised in the eyes of millions of people who had previously been taken in by MacShane's Euro-McCarthyism.

In Holland, the government in its desperation to turn the situation around, went down the Euro-McCarthyite road by

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putting out television adverts claiming that non-ratification might lead to "mass genocide" in Europe once again. The "yes" camp were reiterating a speech made by the EU Commission's propaganda Tsar, Margot Wallstrom, on the site of the Jewish ghetto of Terezin in the Czech Republic. She said that the Holocaust was linked to the existence of "nationalistic pride" and that only supranational authority could prevent it happening again. As Tory MP Richard Shepherd remarked: "It's a monstrous rewriting of history to promote a profoundly undemocratic project". In saying what she did, Ms Wallstrom conveniently forgot to mention that the various fascist regimes of the 1930s and 40s openly advocated a Pan-European state. Millions of French and Dutch voters were clearly not impressed by such desperate and obscene

lines of argument. The dirty politics of Euro-McCarthyism have been seen to fail and this means that the way is now open for a more rational and honest debate in Britain and across Europe about what should happen now.

The centre of political gravity has shifted and it is the Pan-European centralisers who now appear to be an outdated rump of political flat-earthers desperately trying to breathe life into their discredited project. The goal of a Pan-European state now does not seem so "inevitable", to say the least. In Germany and Italy voices are now even being raised against the continuation of the single currency. This will soon spread to France and Ireland. Without further progression towards a full-on EU state to support it, it is hard to see how the Euro can survive. Profound fissures on a range of issues are beginning to appear between the governments of "old" and "new" Europe. As we EU-sceptics, whether from the right or the left, have always argued, "one size does not fit all".

With the probable blocking of the Constitution, those of us adhering to a more modern, flexible and decentralised vision that respects the diversity of our continent can now go on the offensive. The old claim used by Ken Clarke and others that there could be no questioning of the EU status quo from an EU-sceptical perspective is redundant. We are no longer fighting a rearguard, oppositionist action against an endless transfer of new powers to Brussels. However, this also presents us with the challenge of developing a realistic and convincing set of proposals to present to the peoples of Europe. The hard part for us is about to start. Simply sloganising and deploying broad brush arguments against the EU-centralisers will not now be enough. For a little while yet, however, I fully intend drawing comfort from Denis MacShane's richly deserved discomfort.

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